MILESTONES

BENNETT AND KNOBLOCK

MILESTONES

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY

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AND
EDWARD KNOBLOCK

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TORONTO

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TO

FRANK VERNON

WHO HAVING BROUGHT THE AUTHORS TOGETHER IN-
STRUCTED THEM TO COLLABORATE IN A PLAY AND
WHO WHEN THEY HAD OBEYED HIM PUT THE
PLAY ON THE STAGE WITH AN ART WHICH
EVOKED THEIR LIVELIEST GRATITUDE

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

JOHN RHEAD. 25
GERTRUDE RHEAD. 21
MRS. RHEAD. 60
SAMUEL SIBLEY. 28
ROSE SIBLEY. 21
NED PYM. 20
EMILY RHEAD.
ARTHUR PREECE.
NANCY SIBLEY.
LORD MONKHURST.
THE HONOURABLE MURIEL PYM.
RICHARD SIBLEY.
THOMPSON.
WEBSTER.
FOOTMAN.

The Scene is laid throughout in the drawing-room of a house in Kensington Gore.

The First Act is in 1860.
The Second Act is in 1885.
The Third Act is in 1912.

MILESTONES

ACT I

1860

[NOTE.— Right and left are from the point of view of the actor.]

The Scene represents the drawing-room of a house in Kensington Gore. The house is quite new at the time: all the decorations, pictures and furniture are of the mid-Victorian period. On the left three long windows look out on Kensington Gardens. On the right a large double door leads into the back drawing-room. A single door on the same side of the room leads to the hall and stairs. In the centre at back a large fireplace with a fire burning in it. The blinds and curtains are drawn; the lamps are lighted.

It is about half-past nine at night of the 29th of December, 1860.

[*Mrs. Rhead, a woman of nearly sixty, is sitting on the sofa, crocheting some lace, which is evidently destined to trim petticoats. Her hair is dressed in the style of* 1840, *though her dress is of the* 1860 *period. Near her, in an*

armchair, sits Rose Sibley, a gentle, romantic-looking girl of twenty-one, who is dressed in the height of fashion of the period. She is at work on a canvas wool-work pattern. Cups of after-dinner coffee stand near both ladies.]

Mrs. R. Do permit me to look at your work one moment, my dear Rose.

Rose. With pleasure, Mrs. Rhead.

Mrs. R. Very pretty indeed. Nothing could be in better taste than these Berlin wool patterns.

Rose. I got the design from the "English-woman's Domestic Magazine." It's to be one of three cushions for father's study.

Mrs. R. I had an idea of doing the same sort of thing for my husband, after we moved into the new house here, three years ago. But then, when he died, I hadn't the heart to go on. So I'm crocheting lace now instead for Gertrude's trousseau. Will you have some more coffee?

Rose. No, thank you.

Mrs. R. Just a drop. Gertrude, pour out — [*She looks about.*] Now where has Gertrude disappeared to?

Rose. She left the room some moments ago.

Mrs. R. Even between dinner and coffee she must be off.

Rose. But why?

Mrs. R. Do I know, my dear? Just managing the house and managing it, and managing it.

Upon my word, Gertrude performs the duties of the place as if it were the foundry and she were John. My son and daughter are so alike.

Rose [*interjecting enthusiastically*]. One's as splendid as the other.

Mrs. R. She keeps account-books now.

Rose [*rather startled*]. Of the house?

Mrs. R. [*nods*]. And she says she shall show John a balance-sheet at quarter-day. Did you ever hear of such behaviour?

Rose. She always was very active, wasn't she? It's in the blood.

Mrs. R. It is not in mine, and I am her mother. No! It is all due to these modern ways; that is what it is.

Rose. I suppose John's rather pleased.

Mrs. R. Yes, John! But what about *your* brother? Will he be pleased? Is Gertrude going to make him the wife his position demands?

Rose. I'm sure he'll be delighted to have his house managed as this one's managed.

Mrs. R. But will it stop at that? Once one begins these modern ways, one never knows where they will end.

Rose. I must say I was surprised she ever accepted Sam.

Mrs. R. [*deprecatingly*]. Surprised? But why?

Rose. We Sibleys are such an extremely old-fashioned family. Look at father! And I do

believe Sam's worse. Yes, I do believe Sam's worse than father. Thank goodness they have your son for a partner — two such slow-coaches, as they are.

Mrs. R. Slow-coaches! My dear, remember the respect due to your father.

Rose [*eagerly*]. Oh, I adore father, and Sam, too! I wouldn't have either of them altered for the world. But I do think Sam's very fortunate in getting Gertrude.

Mrs. R. She also is very fortunate, very fortunate indeed. I have the highest respect for Sam's character, and my hope and prayer is that he and Gertrude will influence each other for nothing but good. But, between you and me, my dear, the first six months will be — well — lively, to say the least. [*Gertrude Rhead enters by the door from the hall, carrying in her hand a cloak of the latest pattern of the period. She is twenty-one, high spirited, independent, afraid of no one.*]

Rose. What on earth's that, Gertrude?

Gert. I've just been upstairs to get it. Help me, will you? I wanted to show it you. [*Rose helps Gertrude with the cloak.*] I only bought it to-day, with the money John gave me for Christmas. Thank you — Well?

Rose. Very daring, isn't it? I suppose it's quite the latest?

Gert. Next year's. Mother says it's "fast."

Mrs. R. I hope you'll put it away before the men come up.

Gert. [*with assumed innocence*]. Why?

Mrs. R. Because Samuel will surely not approve of it.

Gert. I bet you he will.

Mrs. R. Gertrude!

Gert. The truth is, Rose, mother's only taken a prejudice against it because I brought it home myself this afternoon in a handsome cab.

Rose [*staggered*]. Alone? In a hansom cab?

Mrs. R. You may well be shocked, dear. My lady refuses the carriage, becauses of keeping the horses standing in this terrible frost. And then she actually hails a hansom-cabriolet! What Samuel would say if he knew I dare not imagine.

Gert. Well, what harm is there in it, mamma darling? [*Caresses her.*] I do wish you'd remember we're in the year 1860 — and very near '61. You really must try to keep up with the times. Why, girls will be riding on the tops of omnibuses some day.

Rose [*protesting*]. Gertrude!

Mrs. R. I hope I sha'n't live to see it. [*Enter Thompson, a young butler, from the hall. He collects the coffee cups, putting them all on a tray.*]

Gert. Is the hot-water apparatus working properly, Thompson?

Thompson. Moderate, miss.

Gert. [*rather annoyed*]. It ought to work perfectly.

Rose. What's the hot-water apparatus?

Gert. It's for the bath-room, you know.

Rose. Yes. I know you'd got a bath-room.

Gert. It's just the latest device. John had it put in the week mother was down at Brighton. It was his Christmas surprise for her.

Rose. Yes, but I don't understand.

Gert. It's quite simple. We have a boiler behind the kitchen range, and pipes carry the hot water up to the bath. There's one tap for hot and another for cold.

Rose. How wonderful!

Gert. So when you want a hot bath all you have to do ——

Mrs. R. [*drily*]. All we have to do is to tell cook to put down a shoulder of mutton to roast. Very modern!

Gert. [*caressing her mother again*]. Horrid old dear! Thompson, why is it working only moderately?

Thompson [*by the door*]. No doubt because cook had orders that the beef was to be slightly underdone, miss. [*Exit quickly with tray.*]

Gert. [*to Rose*]. That was to please your carnivorous daddy, Rose, and he never came.

Mrs. R. I do hope there's been no trouble down at the foundry between him and my son.

Rose. So do I.

Gert. Why are you both pretending? You know perfectly well there has been trouble between them. You must have noticed the chilliness when our respective brothers met to-night.

Rose. I assure you, Gertrude, I know *nothing.* Sam said not a single word in the carriage.

Gert. Well, wasn't that enough? Or does he never speak in the carriage?

Rose [*to Mrs. Rhead*]. Has John said anything?

Mrs. R. I understood you to say that the reason your father didn't come to dinner was that he had an urgent appointment, quite unexpectedly, at the last moment.

Rose. Yes, he asked me to tell you and make his excuses.

Gert. Urgent appointment at his club — most likely!

Mrs. R. I wonder what the trouble can have been.

Gert. You don't, mother. You know! It's the old story — Sam and his father with their set ideas, pulling one way; and John with his go-ahead schemes, pulling the other — with the result ——

Mrs. R. The result is that we've had one of the most mournful dinners to-night that I have ever had the pleasure of giving.

Gert. I know! What a good thing we asked Ned Pym. If he hadn't come to the rescue with his

usual facetious, senseless chatter, I do believe Sam and John ——

Mrs. R. [*quickly, stopping her*]. Here are the gentlemen! Gertrude, take that cloak off. [*Enter from the hall Samuel Sibley, Ned Pym, and John Rhead. Samuel Sibley is twenty-eight, heavy, with a serious face, a trifle pompous, but with distinct dignity. Ned Pym, who is a little over twenty, is the young dandy of the day; handsome, tall, with excellent manners, which allow him to carry off his facetious attitude rather successfully. John Rhead comes last. He is twenty-five, full of determination and purpose. He knows what he wants and is going to get it.*]

Mrs. R. [*in a smooth tone to Rose*]. Have you seen the new number of "Great Expectations," dear?

Ned. What's this, Gertrude? Charades?

Gert. [*flouncing her cloak half defiantly at Sam*]. Paris!

Ned [*coming between Sam and Gertrude*]. Evidently it has lost nothing on the journey over.

Gert. Ned, would you mind . . . I'm showing it to Sam. [*To Sam.*] Don't you like it?

Sam [*forcing himself*]. On my betrothed, yes.

Ned [*facetiously*]. By the exercise of extreme self-control the lover conceals his enthusiasm for the cloak of his mistress.

Gert. [*appealing to Sam*]. But you do like it — don't you?

Sam [*evasively*]. Isn't it rather original?

Gert. Of course it is. That's just the point.

Sam [*surprised*]. Just the point?

Gert. [*taking the cloak off and flinging it half pettishly on a chair*]. Oh!

John. It's original, and therefore it has committed a crime. [*Looking at Sam.*] Isn't that it, Sam?

Sam [*gives John a look and turns to Mrs. Rhead with an obvious intention of changing the conversation*]. What were you saying about "Great Expectations," Mrs. Rhead?

Mrs. R. [*at a loss*]. What *were* we saying about "Great Expectations"?

Ned. Well, I can tell you one thing about it; it's made my expectations from my uncle smaller than ever. [*He sits by Mrs. Rhead.*]

Mrs. R. Oh, how is dear Lord Monkhurst?

Ned. He's very well and quarrelsome, thank you. And his two sons, my delightful cousins, are also in excellent health. Well, as I was going to tell you; you know how my uncle has turned against Dickens since "Little Dorrit." I happened to say something about "Great Expectations" being pretty fairish, and he up and rode over me like a troop of cavalry.

Mrs. R. [*puzzled*]. A troop of cavalry?

Ned. It was at his Christmas party, too, worse

luck. He as good as told me I disagreed with him on purpose to annoy him. Now I cannot agree with him solely and simply because he allows me seven hundred a year, can I?

Rose. Is he so difficult to get on with?

Ned. Difficult? He's nothing but a faddist! An absolute old faddist! What can you do with a man that's convinced that spirits 'll turn his dining-table, and that Bacon wrote Shakespeare; and that the Benecia Boy's a better man than Tom Sayers?

Mrs. R. It seems a great pity you cannot do something to please your uncle.

Ned. Would you believe it? He even wanted me to join the Rifle Volunteers. Now, I ask you, can you see me in the Rifle Volunteers, me among a lot of stockbrokers and chimney-sweeps?

Gert. We cannot, Ned.

Ned. And in order to raise my patriotism last night — [*Slapping his knee violently.*] By Jove! [*He jumps up.*] By Heavens! Jiggered! Jiggered!

Gert. and Rose. Ned!

Ned. I am a ruined man! You see before you, kind friends, a man ruined and without hope! Last night my uncle sent me a ticket for the launching of the "Warrior."

Sam [*with a sneer*]. The "Warrior"! You didn't miss much!

Ned. But my beloved aunt was commanded to

be in attendance on Her Royal Highness at the said function. . . . Well, I forgot all about it. I repeat I forgot all about it. My uncle will certainly call this the last straw. There will be no quarterly cheque for me on New Year's Day.

Rose. What *is* "The Warrior"?

John [*bursting out*]. The "Warrior" is a steam-frigate — first vessel of the British Navy to be built entirely of iron. She's over six thousand tons burden, and she represents the beginning of a new era in iron.

Rose [*adoringly*]. How splendid!

John [*responding quickly to her mood*]. Ah, you agree with me!

Rose [*enthusiastically*]. Of course! [*She breaks off self-consciously.*] Of course I agree with you.

John [*after a slight pause — quickly*]. This 29th of December marks a great day in the history of the British Navy.

Sam [*with a slight superior smile, trying to be gay*]. Nonsense. All this day marks is the folly of the Admiralty. You may take it as an absolute rule that whatever the Admiralty does is wrong. Always has been, always will be. The "Great Eastern" was the champion White Elephant of the age. And now the "Warrior" has gone her one better.

John. Sam, you don't know what you're say-

ing. How can you talk about the "Warrior" when you've never even so much as laid eyes on the ship?

Sam. Well, have *you?*

John. Yes — I went to the launch to-day.

Sam. You?

Mrs. R. Why did you go, John? You never said a word to me.

John. I went on business.

Sam. You told me you had an appointment with the bank.

John. I only said that because I couldn't stop to argue just then.

Sam. So you said what wasn't so.

John. I said what was necessary at the moment. I wasn't going to leave you in the dark; never fear.

Sam [*curtly controlling himself*]. I see. [*A slight pause, then Sam turns abruptly to Gertrude and says gently*] Come and sing, dear. I haven't heard you sing for over a fortnight.

Gert. [*moved by the quarrel — after a pause in a low voice*]. What shall I sing?

Sam. Sing "Nita, Juanita."

Gert. No! I heard Madame Sainton Dolby sing it last week.

Sam. Do! — to please me. [*Gertrude turns towards the double doors and goes off in silence with Sam. Ned is about to follow instantly, but Mrs. Rhead stops him.*]

Mrs. R. [*whispering*]. Give them just one instant alone.

Ned. I beg pardon. My innocence at fault. [*The song is heard.*] [*A pause.*] Is that long enough? [*Mrs. Rhead taps him, then she goes off after the others, followed by Ned. A slight pause.*]

Rose [*moving towards the doors*]. What a lovely voice she has!

John [*abruptly, closing the doors*]. I want to talk to you.

Rose [*nervous and self-conscious*]. To me?

John. I wish I'd asked you to come to that launch.

Rose. Where was it?

John. At Greenhithe; only two stations beyond the foundry. Would you have come?

Rose. I should have loved to . . . if Gertrude had come too.

John [*musing*]. You should have seen her go into the water — the wave she made! All that iron — and rivets! Iron, mind you. . . . And then float like a cork. I never was at a launch before, and it gave me a thrill, I can tell you. And I'm not easily thrilled.

Rose [*adoringly, but restraining herself*]. I'm sure you're not. I do wish I'd seen it. It must have been almost sublime.

John. You'd have understood. You'd have felt like I did. Do you know how I know that?

Rose [*shaking her head*]. No ——

John. By the way you said "how splendid" when I was telling the others just now.

Rose. Really!

John. Fact! That gave me more encouragement in my schemes than any words I ever heard.

Rose. Please don't say that. Gertrude is always on your side. She's so like you in every way.

John. Yes, Gertrude's all right. But she's got no poetry in her, Gertrude hasn't. That's the difference between you and her. She's very go-ahead; but she doesn't feel. You feel.

Rose [*breathless*]. Do I, John? [*She looks down.*]

John. I'll tell you something — tears came into my eyes when that frigate took the water. Couldn't help it! [*Rose raises her eyes to his.*] In thirty years every big ship in the world will be built of iron. Very few people to-day believe in iron for ship-building, and I know there's a lot of silly, easy sarcasm about it — especially in the papers. But it's coming! It's coming!

Rose [*religiously*]. I'm sure you're right.

John. If only your father and your brother thought as you do!

Rose [*faintly*]. Yes.

John. I'm in the minority, you see; two partners against one. If my father had lived, I know which side *he'd* have been on! I shouldn't have been in the minority then.

Rose. You'd have been equal.

John [*enthusiastically*]. No! We should certainly have rolled your excellent father and brother straight into the Thames!

Rose [*amiably protesting*]. Please ——

John [*smiling*]. Forgive me — you know what I mean, don't you?

Rose. I love to see you when you are enthusiastic!

John. It's so plain. We've got probably the largest iron foundry on Thames-side. But our business isn't increasing as quickly as it used to do. It can't. We've come to about the limit of expansion on present lines. Ship-building is simply waiting for us. There it is — asking to be picked up! We're *in* iron. We know all about iron. The ships of the future will be built of nothing but iron. And we're right in the middle of the largest port in the world. What more can anyone want? But no! They won't see it! They — will — not — see — it!

Rose. I wonder why they won't!

John. Simply because they can't.

Rose. Then one oughtn't to blame them.

John. Blame them! Good Heavens, no! I don't blame them. I'm fond of them, and I rather feel for them. But that's just why I want to smash them to smithereens! They've got to yield. The people who live in the past *must* yield to the people who live in the future. Otherwise, the

earth would begin to turn the other way round, and we should be back again in the eighteenth century before we knew where we were, making for the Middle Ages.

Rose. Then you think a conflict is unavoidable?

John. Absolutely unavoidable! That's the point. It's getting nearer every hour. . . . Why is your father not here to-night?

Rose. I don't know, but I was afraid ——

John. *I* know and *Sam* knows. It must be because he has heard somehow of an enterprise I am planning, and the news has upset him. He's vexed.

Rose. Poor dear old thing! Then you've started a scheme already?

John [*nods*]. I have. But I can't carry it out alone.

Rose. If there is one man in the world who could stand alone, I should have said you were that man.

John. I know. That's the impression I give. And yet nobody ever needed help more than I do. I'm not all on the surface, you know.

Rose. What sort of help?

John. Sympathy — understanding.

Rose [*low*]. I see.

John. Of course you see! And that's why I suddenly decided I must have a bit of a chat with you — this very night. It's forced on me. And I

feel I'm rather forcing it on you. But I can't help it — honestly I can't. Rose, you're on my side, aren't you?

Rose. I believe you're in the right.

John. Would you like to see me win — [*silence*] — or lose?

Rose. I don't think I could bear to see you beaten.

John. Well, then, help me! When you look at me with that trustful look of yours, I can do anything — anything. No other woman's eyes ever had the same effect on me. It's only because you believe in me. No, that isn't the only reason; it isn't the chief reason. The chief reason is that I'm in love with you — there you have it!

Rose [*sinking her head*]. Oh! ——

John [*coming to her*]. Curious! I've known you all my life. But I wasn't aware of all that you meant to me, until these difficulties began. You're essential to me. You can't imagine how much depends on just you!

Rose. Really?

John. You're too modest, too womanly to realise it. Why, sometimes a tone of yours, a mere inflection, almost knocks me over — You aren't crying, surely? What are you crying for?

Rose. It's too much for me, coming like this, with no warning.

John. Rose, be mine! I'll work for you, I'll

succeed for you. No woman in this country shall have a finer position than yours.

Rose. I don't want a fine position — except for you.

John. I'm not hard, really.

Rose. But I like you to be hard. It's when you're inflexible and brutal that I like you the most.

John. Then you do like me a little — sometimes? [*Kisses her hands.*]

Rose. I can't help telling you. I didn't hope for this. Yes, I did. But the hope seemed absurd. Is this real — now?

John. My love!

Rose. John, you say I don't realise how much I mean to you. Perhaps I do though. But it's impossible for *you* to realise how I want to give my life to you, to serve you. No *man* could realise that. A woman could. I shall be your slave. [*John looks at her with a little start.*] Yes, I know it sounds queer for me to be talking like this. But I must. It thrills me to tell you. . . . I shall be your slave.

John. Don't make me afraid, my darling!

Rose. Afraid?

John. Afraid of being unworthy.

Rose. Please. . . . [*A slight pause.*] Has the singing stopped?

John. A long time ago.

Rose. They'll be coming in, perhaps.

John [*vaguely without conviction*]. No.

Rose. What will your mother and Gertrude say?

John. You know as well as I do, they'll be absolutely delighted.

Rose. And father?

John [*alertly*]. Rose, you're mine, whatever happens?

Rose. Oh, nothing must happen now! Nothing shall happen!

John. But suppose I couldn't carry out my scheme without quarrelling with your father? And he refused his consent to our being married?

Rose. My heart would be yours for ever and ever. But I couldn't marry without father's consent.

John. But ——

Rose. I couldn't ——

John. Why not?

Rose. It would not be right.

John. But you love me?

Rose. Yes, but I love father, too. And he's getting very old. And he's very dependent on me. In any case to give me up would be a great sacrifice for him. To lose me against his will — well, I don't know what would happen!

John. As things are just now — he's bound to refuse.

Rose. But are you so sure he won't have anything to do with your scheme?

John. You heard Sam!

Rose. Yes; but you haven't discussed your plans very thoroughly with Sam. He seemed quite surprised.

John. Suppose I speak to Sam to-night; tell him everything. At any rate, I shall know then where I stand.

Rose. To-night?

John. Now! I *might* win him over. Anyhow, he'll do what he can to make things smooth for us with your father — surely! After all, he's engaged to Gertrude!

Rose. Just as you think best. . . . And Sam's very fond of me, though he never shows it.

John. Let me get it over now, instantly. Will you go in to the others? [*Rose looks at him in silence, then rises and goes to the double doors. John stops her and solemnly and passionately kisses her, then opens the doors and she passes through.*]

John [*calling into the other room*]. I say, Sam! Mother, I want a word with Sam alone. [*Samuel enters by the double doors. John closes them behind him.*]

Sam [*suspicious, and not over friendly*]. What is it? Not business, I hope?

John [*with a successful effort to be cordial*]. No, no!

Sam [*following John's lead, and to make con-*

versation]. I was wondering what you and Rosie were palavering about.

John. Samuel, you've gone right into the bull's-eye at the first shot — Sam. I've just been through a very awkward moment.

Sam. Oh, I see! That's it, is it?

John. I've made a proposal of marriage to my partner's sister. Startling, ain't it?

Sam. No! If you care to know, I was talking to your mother about it last week.

John. About what?

Sam. About the betting odds — whether it was more likely to come off this year or next. Your mother was right, and I was wrong — by a couple of days.

John [*startled*]. But you'd none of you the slightest ground. I've never shown — Certainly Rose has never shown ——

Sam [*teasingly*]. No, of course not. But you know how people *will* gossip, and jump to conclusions, don't you? I know, I went through it myself, not very long ago either. I remember the clever way in which you all knew about it before I'd got half-way to the end of my first sentence.

John. Sam, you're devilish funny.

Sam. Even the dullest old Tory is funny once in his life. Am I right in assuming that Rose did not unconditionally refuse your offer?

John. She did me the honour to accept it.

Sam. I must confess I'm not entirely surprised that she didn't spurn you.

John. All right, old cock. Keep it up. I don't mind. But when you're quite done, you might congratulate me.

Sam [*not effusively*]. I do, of course.

John. I suppose you'll admit, even as a brother, that I'd have to go rather far before I met a woman with half Rose's qualities.

Sam. Yes, Rosie's all right. Of course she's cold; she hasn't got what I call poetry in her. That's the difference between her and Gertrude.

John [*facing him*]. Do you honestly think Rose has no poetry in her? Rose?

Sam. Easy does it, my tulip! Have it your own way!

John [*good humouredly*]. I suppose where sisters are concerned, all brothers are alike.

Sam. Well, I'm looking at one. We're a pair.

John. Shake! [*They shake hands, Sam rather perfunctorily.*] Now, Sam, I'm going to rely on you.

Sam. What for?

John. I don't think you had any fault to find with my attitude towards your engagement, had you? I welcomed it with both arms. Well, I want you to do the same with me.

Sam. But, my dear fellow, I'm nobody in the affair. You're the head of a family; I'm not.

John. But you have enormous influence with the head of a family, my boy.

Sam [*rather falsely*]. Why! Are you anticipating trouble with the governor?

John. I'm not anticipating it — but you know as well as I do — probably much better — that he ain't very friendly disposed this last day or two. The plain truth is — he's sulking. Now why? Nothing whatever has passed between us except just every-day business.

Sam. Well, the fact is, he suspects you're keeping something nasty up your sleeve for him.

John. Has he told you?

Sam [*somewhat pugnaciously*]. Yes, he has.

John. And what is it I'm supposed to have up my sleeve?

Sam. Look here, Jack. I'm not here to be cross-examined. If there's anything up your sleeve, you're the person to know what it is. It's not my sleeve we're talking about. Why don't you play with the cards on the table?

John. I'm only too anxious to play with the cards on the table.

Sam. Then it is business you really wanted to talk about after all!

John [*movement of irritation concealed*]. I expect your father's heard about me and Macleans, though how it's got abroad I can't imagine.

Sam. Macleans? Macleans of Greenhithe?

John. Yes. That's what's worrying the old man, isn't it?

Sam. I don't know.

John. He hasn't mentioned Macleans to you?

Sam. He has not. He isn't a great talker, you know. He merely said to me he suspected you were up to something.

John. And what did you say?

Sam. Briefly, I said I thought you *were.* [*Disgustedly.*] But, by gad! I never dreamed you were hobnobbing with the Maclean gang.

John. Macleans are one of the oldest ship-building firms in the South of England. I went to the launch to-day with Andrew Maclean.

Sam. What's ship-building got to do with us?

John. It's got nearly everything to do with us. Or it will have. Now listen, Sammy. I've arranged a provisional agreement for partnership between Macleans and ourselves.

Sam. You've ——

John. Half a minute. Macleans are rather flattered at the idea of a connection with the august firm of Sibley, Rhead and Sibley.

Sam. By God! I should think they were. [*Walks away.*]

John. They've had an output of over 25,000 tons this year. All wood. Naturally they want to go in for iron. They'll pay handsomely for our help and experience. In fact, I've got a draft

agreement, my boy, that is simply all in our favour.

Sam. Did you seriously suppose ——

John. Let me finish. It's a brilliant agreement. In three years it'll mean the doubling of our business. And we shall have the satisfaction of being well-established in the great industry of the future. Your father's old. I don't expect him to be very enthusiastic about a new scheme. But you're young, and you can influence him. He'll be retiring soon, and you and I will be together — just the two of us. We're marrying each other's sisters. And we shall divide an enormous fortune, my boy.

Sam. And have you had the impudence to try to make an agreement behind our backs?

John [*controlling himself*]. I've made no agreement. I've only got the offer. It's open to you to refuse or accept. I only held my tongue about it so as to keep the job as easy as possible.

Sam. You had no right to approach anyone without consulting us.

John. I was going to tell you to-morrow. But I guessed from your father's attitude these last two days that something had leaked out. That's why I'm telling you first, Sam — to-night. Come now, look at the thing calmly — reasonably. Don't condemn it offhand. A very great deal depends on your decision — more than you think.

Sam. I don't see that anything particular de-

pends on my decision. If we refuse, we refuse. And we shall most decidedly refuse.

John. But it's impossible you should be so blind to the future! Impossible!

Sam. See here, John! Don't you make the mistake of assuming that any man who doesn't happen to agree with you is a blind fool. To begin with, it isn't polite. I know you *do* think we're blind, old-fashioned, brainless dolts, father and I. We've both felt that for some time.

John. I think you're blind to the future of iron ships, that's all.

Sam. Well, shall I tell you what we think of *you?* We think you've got a bee in your bonnet. That's all. We think you're a faddist in the style of Ned Pym's noble uncle!

John [*his lips curling*]. Me like Lord Monkhurst! Ha!

Sam. Precisely. Don't you go and imagine that all the arguments are on one side. They aren't. Five-sixths of the experts in England have no belief whatever in the future of iron ships. You know that! Iron ships indeed! And what about British oak? Would you build ships of the self-same material as bridges? Why not stone ships, then? Oh, yes, I know there's a number of faddists up and down the land — anything in the nature of a novelty is always bound to attract a certain type of brain. Unfortunately we happen to have that type of brain just now in the

Cabinet. I quite agree with my father that the country is going to the dogs. Another Reform Bill this year! And actually an attempt to repeal the paper duty. But, of course, people who believe in iron ships would naturally want to unsettle the industrial classes by a poisonous flood of cheap newspapers! However, we've had enough commonsense left to knock both those schemes on the head. And I've no doubt the sagacity of the country will soon also put an end to this fantastic notion of iron ships.

John [*quietly*]. I see.

Sam. Oh, don't think I'm not fond of iron! Iron means as much to me as it does to you. But I flatter myself I can keep my balance. [*More quietly.*] We didn't expect this of you, John, with your intellect.

John [*as before*]. Very well.

Sam. I've made it clear, haven't I?

John. Quite.

Sam. That's all right.

John [*still quietly*]. Only I shall dissolve partnership.

Sam. Dissolve partnership? What for?

John. I shall go on with Macleans alone.

Sam. You don't mean it.

John. I mean every single word of it! [*He rises. They look at each other.*]

Sam. Then I can tell you one thing. You won't marry Rosie.

John. Why sha'n't I marry Rosie?

Sam. After such treachery.

John [*raising his voice*]. Treachery! I merely keep my own opinion — I leave you to yours.

Sam. Do you think father will let you drag Rose into this fatuous scheme of yours? Do you think he'll give his daughter to a traitor?

John [*sarcastic and cold*]. Don't get on stilts. [*Then suddenly bursting out.*] And what has my marriage got to do with you? When I want your father's opinion, I'll go to your father for it.

Sam. Don't try to browbeat me, John. I know my father's mind, and what's more, you know I know it. And I repeat, my father will never let his daughter marry a ——

John [*shouting*]. Silence! [*Enter Mrs. Rhead by the double doors, followed by Ned Pym, Gertrude and Rose. The women remain silent.*]

Ned [*facetiously coming forward*]. Why silence? Go on. We've only come in because we thought it might interest us. What's it all about? A hint will suffice.

John. Ned, you're a blundering donkey, and you will be a blundering donkey to the end of your life.

Ned. My one desire is to please.

Gert. [*coming to Sam, in a quiet, firm tone*]. Sam, what's the matter?

Sam. Nothing! We must go! Rosie, get ready. [*Very respectfully to Mrs. Rhead.*] I'm sorry to break up the evening.

Gert. But you can't go like this.

Sam [*with deference*]. My dear Gertrude, please leave matters to your brother and me. You're a woman, and there are things ——

Gert. [*stopping him*]. It is possible I am a woman, but I'm a reasonable creature, and I intend to be treated as such.

Mrs. R. [*very upset*]. My dear child, remember you are speaking to your future husband.

Gert. That's just why I'm speaking as I am. I ask Sam what's the matter — [*scornfully*] — and he says "Nothing." Am I a child? Are we all children?

Sam [*curtly*]. Come, now, Rose.

Gert. And why must Rose go off like this? She's engaged to John.

Sam. Who told you?

Gert. Her eyes told me when she came out of this room.

Mrs. R. We all knew it, and no word said. We've been expecting it for weeks. [*Mrs. Rhead and Rose embrace.*]

Sam. You are mistaken, Gertrude. Rose is not engaged to John, and she is not likely to be.

Gert. You object?

Sam. I do, and I know my father well.

Gert. You object to John for a brother-in-law?

John! Why? — You might at least condescend to tell Rosie, if not me. It's an affair that rather interests her, you see.

Sam. If you must know, John is going to leave our firm.

Mrs. R. John?

Sam. He thinks my father and I are old-fashioned, and so he's leaving us.

Mrs. R. John! Leave the firm? Surely you're not thinking of breaking up Rhead and Sibley?

Sam. Sibley, Rhead — and Sibley.

Mrs. R. It was Rhead and Sibley in my young days, when your father and John's were founding it. John, you cannot mean it!

Sam [*sarcastically*]. He's going to build iron ships.

Gert. And is that any reason why you should make poor Rosie unhappy and spoil her life?

Sam. I do not propose to argue.

Gert. The man who does not propose to argue with me is not going to be my husband.

Mrs. R. Gertrude!

Gert. [*looking at Sam*]. I mean it. [*Sam bows.*]

Mrs. R. Please don't listen to her, Sam.

Sam. All my apologies, Mrs. Rhead.

Gert. And you, Rosie, what do you say to all this?

Rose [*humbly and tearfully*]. I — I hardly understand. Sam, what is the matter?

John [*coming to Rose*]. It's quite simple. I believe in the future of iron ships and I have the courage of my convictions. Therefore you are not to be allowed to marry me. You see the connection is perfectly clear. But you shall marry me, all the same!

Sam [*confidently*]. You don't know my sister.

Ned [*to Sam, facetiously*]. And you don't know John.

Sam [*turning to Ned, firmly*]. Ned, go and order my carriage, there's a good fellow.

Ned [*going off by the door into the hall*]. Oh, very well. [*He closes the door behind him.*]

Mrs. R. John, John, why are you so set in your own ideas? Everything was going perfectly smoothly. We were all so happy. And now you must needs fall out with your partners over iron ships. Do you prefer your iron ships to Rose's happiness and your own? *Is everything* to be sacrificed to iron ships?

John. There need be no question of sacrifice, if ——

Sam. If you can have it your own way. Of course. Mrs. Rhead, your son wants to risk the ruin of all of us. Now, so far as we Sibleys are concerned, we won't allow him to do so. If he still persists in his purpose, very well, that's *his*

look-out. Only — he can hardly be surprised if Rose's family object — and very strongly — to letting him make her his wife. One does not entrust one's daughter or one's sister to a traitor.

Gert. Sam, don't be childish!

Sam [*drawing himself up*]. I beg your pardon.

Mrs. R. John, I'm your mother. Listen to me. Give up this idea of yours. For my sake — for the sake of all of us.

John. I cannot.

Mrs. R. But if it means so much unhappiness.

John. I should be ashamed of myself if I gave it up. I believe in it. It's my religion.

Mrs. R. John, I beg you not to be profane.

John [*a little quieter*]. I cannot give up my idea, mother. I should be a coward to give it up. I should be miserable for the rest of my days. I could never look anyone in the face, not even my wife. [*Enter Ned from the hall.*]

Ned [*to Sam in a flunkey's voice*]. Carriage is waiting, my lord.

Sam. Now, Rose! Good evening, Mrs. Rhead.

Gert. Just a moment. [*Drawing a ring off her finger*]. Ned! Hand this ring to Mr. Sibley with my compliments.

Ned. Must I?

Gert. Yes.

Ned [*taking the ring*]. The donkey becomes a beast of burden. [*Handing ring to Sam.*] Sam,

you get this, but you lose something that's worth a lot more.

Sam [*taking the ring*]. Of course I have no alternative.

Rose. Good-bye John.

Mrs. R. John, she's going. Will you let her?

John [*rigidly*]. I cannot give up my idea.

Sam [*going into the hall as Rose stands hesitating*]. Come along, child. I'm waiting.

Rose [*moving a step towards John*]. Stick to your idea! Let me go! I love you all the more for it!

John. Don't worry, Rose. The future is on our side.

Rose [*looking straight at him*]. I —— [*Her emotion gets the better of her; she turns quickly and hurries from the room.*]

Gert. [*blankly, in spite of herself*]. The future! [*She sinks down on a sofa and bursts into sobs. John stands, looking after Rose.*]

[*Curtain.*]

ACT II

1885

The Scene represents the same drawing-room as in Act I. But twenty-five years have passed. We are now in the year 1885. *Consequently great changes have occurred. The furniture has been re-arranged and added to. The flowered carpet of the first Act has given place to an Indian carpet. There are new ornaments amongst some of the old ones. The room is over-crowded with furniture in the taste of the period.*

It is about four o'clock of an afternoon in June. The curtains are drawn back and the sun is shining brightly outside.

[*Rose Sibley, now Mrs. John Rhead, forty-six years of age and dressed in the fashion of* 1885, *her hair slightly grey at the temples, is seated writing some notes at a desk near the windows.*]

[*Ned Pym enters from the hall, followed by John Rhead. The former has developed into a well-preserved, florid, slightly self-sufficient man of forty-six. The latter, now fifty, has not changed so much physically except that his hair is grey and his features have become much*

firmer. But his manner has grown even more self-assured than it was in the first Act. He is in fact a person of authority; the successful man whose word is law.]

John. Oh, you *are* there, Rosie. I've brought a person of importance to see you.

Rose [*rising*]. Ned —— [*They shake hands.*]

Ned. Now please don't say what you were going to say.

Rose. And what was I going to say?

Ned. That I'm quite a stranger since I came into the title.

Rose [*curtseying and teasing*]. Lord Monkhurst, we are only too flattered — I was merely going to say that you look younger than ever.

Ned [*seriously*]. Don't I? That's what everyone says. Time leaves me quite unchanged, don't you know.

John. In every way. How old *are* you, Ned?

Ned [*with a sigh*]. Well, I shall never see thirty again.

John. What about forty?

Ned. Or forty either. But my proud boast is I'm nearer forty than fifty.

John. Well, it can only be by a couple of months.

Ned. Sh! — It's a lot more than you say, Jack.

John. I was fifty in April. There's just five years' difference between us.

Rose [*to Ned*]. You look more like John's son.

Ned. Say nephew; don't be too hard on him.

Rose. But I do wish you would go out of mourning. It doesn't suit you.

Ned. Not these beautiful continuations?

Rose. No!

Ned. Well, I'm awfully sorry. But I can't oblige you yet. Please remember I've got three sudden deaths to work off. I think that when a man loses a harsh but beloved uncle in a carriage accident, and two amiable cousins through a misunderstanding about toadstools, all in twelve months, why — [*gesture*] — the least he can do is to put himself unreservedly into the hands of his tailor.

Rose. I ——

John [*stopping her, kindly but rather tyrannically*]. Now enough of this graceful badinage. Ned and I are here on business. What are you up to, there, Rose?

Rose [*with eager submissiveness*]. I was doing the invitations for the dinner, or rather for the reception.

John. Good. I've got some more names in my study. You'd better come in there with me.

Rose. Yes, love.

Ned. Am I invited to this dinner? I generally get very hungry about eight o'clock at nights.

Rose [*teasing*]. Yes, I *think* I put you down. It's our wedding-day.

Ned. Don't tell me how long you've been married. It would age me!

Rose. Considering that we have a daughter who is turned twenty-two.

John. Yes, Ned, you must face the facts bravely. Old Mr. Sibley died in January, 1860 ——

Rose. Sixty-one, love.

John [*after a frown at being corrected*]. Sixty-one. And we were married in June of the following year. Surely you recall the face Sam pulled when he gave my little Rosie away.

Rose. But, love, it was a great concession for him to give me away at all, wasn't it?

John. Oh, yes!

Rose. By the bye, he's coming up to town this afternoon.

John. What, here?

Ned. Oh! But I ought to see old Sam.

Rose. Stay for tea, and you'll see *him* and his wife, too.

Ned. His wife? His what did you say?

Rose. Now, Ned, it's no use pretending you don't know all about it.

Ned. I remember hearing a couple of years ago, before I went to India, that Sam had staggered his counting-house by buying one of these new type-writing machines, and getting a young woman to work it for him.

Rose. That's the person. Her name is Nancy.

Ned. Is it? Only fancy; Nancy, Nancy, in the counting-*house!* I say — are these girl-clerks or clerk-girls going to be a regular thing? What's coming over the world?

John [*shakes his head*]. Passing craze! Goes with all this Votes-for-Women agitation and so on. You'll see, it won't last a year — not a year? Of course, Sam — susceptible bachelor of fifty and over — just the man to fall a victim. Inevitable!

Rose. She's a very well-meaning, honest creature.

Ned. You intimate with her, Rose?

Rose. I went to see her several times after she had her baby. They're living at Brockley.

Ned. Baby! Brockley! No more typewriting then. The typewriter has served its turn — eh? Of course it was a great catch for her.

John. Yes, but it wouldn't have been if Samuel hadn't sold out.

Ned. How much did he retire with about?

John. Well, you see he was losing three thousand a year. He got £20,000 net cash.

Ned. I'm not a financier, but £20,000 cash in exchange for a loss of £3,000 a year doesn't seem so bad! Think of the money he'd have made though, if he'd taken up with your ideas!

John [*ironically*]. You recollect the folly of iron ships? And the bee in my bonnet? [*Laughs.*] There were only four wooden steamships built in

this country last year. The rest were iron; and I was responsible for half a dozen of 'em.

Ned. What's all this talk about steel for ships?

John [*disdainfully*]. Just talk.

Ned. Well, of course, if you're building at the rate of six steamers a year, I can understand your generosity in the matter of subscriptions.

Rose. He *is* generous, isn't he?

Ned. Told your wife about your latest contribution?

John. No, I was just going to.

Rose [*proudly*]. John tells me everything.

John. And Rosie always approves, don't you, Rosie? Ah! The new generation can't show such wives.

Rose [*eagerly*]. Well?

John. I've decided to give ten thousand pounds to the party funds — politics, you know.

Ned. You see, it's to save the country. That's what it amounts to practically, in these days. *I* know, since I've gone into politics.

Rose. How noble! I'm so glad, John.

Ned. And the great secret — shall I tell her, or will you, Jack?

John. Go on.

Ned. How should you like your husband to be a baronet, Rose?

Rose. A baronet?

Ned. Sir John Rhead, Bart., and Lady Rhead!

Rose [*ecstatic*]. Is he going to be?

Ned. As soon as our side comes into power — and we shall be in power in a month. John 'll be on the next Honours' List.

Rose. In a month!

Ned. The Budget's bound to be thrown out. They're trying to increase the taxes on beer and spirits — I've studied the question deeply. I know what will happen.

Rose. How magnificent!

John. Then you approve? [*Rose kisses John fondly*]. That's all we've called in for, just to make sure.

Rose [*weeping*]. I ——

John. What's the matter?

Rose. I'm only sorry we haven't had a son.

Ned. There, there! I'm sure you did your best, Rose.

Rose [*to John*]. Are they making you a baronet because you're giving ten thousand to the party funds?

Ned. My dear woman! Of course not! That's pure coincidence.

Rose [*convinced*]. Oh!

Ned. Your beloved John will be made a baronet solely on account of his splendid services to commerce. Doesn't he deserve it?

Rose. No one better. Do you know, I can scarcely believe it. Who —? Tell me all about it.

John. Well, it's thanks to Ned in the first place.

Rose. To Ned?

Ned [*pretending to be hurt*]. You needn't be so surprised, Rose. You seem to be unaware that I've gone into politics. Don't you read the newspapers?

Rose. No, I leave the newspapers to my daughter.

Ned. If you did, you'd know that I made a sensation in the Indian Debate, in the House of Lords. All that Afghanistan business, don't you know.

Rose. Really!

Ned. Oh, I became quite a Nob, at once. Bit of luck me having gone to India, wasn't it? I'd spent the best part of a month in India; so, of course, I knew all about it.

Rose [*solemnly*]. Of course.

Ned. The leader of the Opposition said I had a great future!

John. No doubt.

Ned [*simply*]. I shall specialise in India and the Navy. You see my father being a rear-admiral, I ought to be familiar with the subject. If fellows like me don't begin to take an interest in in our neglected Navy, England 'll be playing second fiddle to Russia in five years' time. Mark my word, in 1890. In 1890.

Rose. Perhaps you'll be in the Government some day?

Ned. There's no " perhaps " about it. I shall! There's only one difficulty.

Rose. What's that?

Ned [*mysteriously and important*]. I'm told I ought to marry.

John [*rather self-consciously*]. Nothing simpler.

Ned. I know! I've had seventeen indirect offers this last six months, and that's a fact.

Rose. None suitable?

Ned. I'm afraid of 'em. It's no joke going and marrying a perfect stranger. I want somebody I know — somebody I've known all my life, or at least all hers.

Rose. And can't you find her?

Ned. I can. I *have* done.

Rose. Who is it, may one ask?

Ned. Jack knows.

John [*turning to Rose and clearing his throat*]. Ned would like to marry into *our* family, Rose.

Ned [*eagerly*]. You know I've been dead sweet on Emily for a couple of years at least.

Rose [*after a pause*]. I know you're very fond of her, and she of you.

Ned [*as above*]. You think she is, really?

Rose. But it seems so queer.

John [*peremptorily*]. How queer? We're respectable enough for the young rascal, aren't we?

Rose. Of course. It would be ideal — ideal! My poor little Emily!

Ned. Well, I've got that off my chest. I'll be moving. I must be at the Carlton at three-thirty to settle up John's business with the panjandrum.

Rose. You'll come back for tea. *She* 'll be here. [*Enter from the hall Emily and Gertrude. Both are dressed to go out. Emily is a handsome girl of twenty-two. She has fine qualities, combining her father's pluck with her mother's loving nature. But she has been rather spoilt by her parents. Gertrude follows. She has grown into a faded, acidy spinster with protective impulses for her niece, Emily, on whom she spends all her suppressed maternal feelings.*]

Emily [*slightly disconcerted*]. Why, father! How is it you aren't at the works this afternoon earning our bread-and-butter?

John [*delighted*]. Such impertinence!

Rose. Emily, I really wonder at you! What your grandmother Rhead would have said to such manners if she'd been alive, I daren't think. And Lord Monkhurst here, too!

Emily. Well, mamma, you see, grandmother isn't alive! [*To Ned, who, after shaking hands with Gertrude, advances towards her*]. And as for dear old Uncle Ned —— [*Ned, John and Rose are all somewhat put about by this greeting. Ned hesitates, his hand half out.*] Aren't you going to shake hands, then?

Ned [*shaking hands*]. Why "uncle"? You've never called me uncle before?

Emily. Haven't I? It seems to suit you.

Ned. I'm severely wounded. And I shall retire into my wigwam until you make it up to me.

Rose. You really are very pert, Emily.

Emily [*affectionately*]. I should have thought you would adore being my uncle. I'm sure I like you lots more than I like Uncle Sam, for instance.

Ned. That's better. I'm peeping out of my wigwam now. Only I won't be your uncle. I won't be anybody's uncle. I don't mind being your cousin, if that's any use to you.

Gert. [*sharply*]. He's afraid of being taken for the same age as your auntie, darling.

Ned [*to Gertrude*]. Half a moment, Gertrude, and I'll try to think of a compliment that will turn your flank.

Gert. My flank, Ned?

Ned. I mean ——

Emily [*to her parents and Ned*]. Where were you all off to?

Rose. Your father and I are going to the study.

Ned. And I'm going on an errand, but I shan't be long.

John. And may we ask where you and Auntie Gertrude are "off to," Miss Inquisitive?

Gert. Oh, Mr. Preece is calling for us to take us to the Royal Academy.

Emily. And then we shall have tea at the new

Hotel Métropole, in Northumberland Avenue. It's the very latest thing.

John [*in a different tone*]. Preece? But he was here last Sunday.

Emily. Yes, it was then we arranged it.

John. I don't like the idea of your seeing so much of Preece. And your mother doesn't like it, either.

Rose. No, indeed!

Gert. But why not? He's the cleverest man in your works. You've often said so.

John. He may be the cleverest man in my works; but he isn't going to be the cleverest man in my house. Who gave him leave to take half a day off, I should like to know?

Gert. He said he had business in the West End.

Emily [*to Ned*]. Now if you want to make yourself useful as a cousin, please explain to these called-so parents that they oughtn't to spoil me one day, and rule me with a rod of iron the next. It's not fair. It's very bad for my disposition.

Ned [*to John*]. Is this man-about-town the same Preece you were telling me of?

Emily. There you are, you see! He tells everyone about Mr. Preece. He's as proud as Punch of Mr. Preece.

John [*more kindly*]. Arthur Preece is a youth that I discovered in my drawing office. Last year I took out a patent for him for bending metal

plates at a low temperature; and it's attracted some attention. But our relations are purely business.

Gert. Still, it was you who first asked him to the house.

John [*drily*]. It was. And Rose kept him for tea. It's all our fault as usual. However — [*rising*] — you'll kindly tell Master Preece that you can't give yourselves the pleasure of his society this afternoon.

Emily. But why?

John [*continuing*]. And if he's obstreperous, inform him that *I* am in my study, and rather anxious to know exactly what his business in the West End is.

Emily [*insisting*]. But why, father?

John [*firmly*]. Simply because your mother and I wish you to be in this afternoon. Uncle Sam and Aunt Nancy are coming, for one thing.

Emily [*disdainfully*]. Uncle Sam! Aunt Nancy!

Rose. Emily! I won't have you bandying words with your father; you seem to have lost all sense of respect.

Emily [*to Ned angrily*]. Aren't they tyrants! [*She goes to a little table and takes off her bonnet, in a quick annoyed way.*]

Rose [*very politely and nicely to Gertrude*]. Gertrude, if *you* aren't going out, could you come into the study about those addresses?

Gert. [*somewhat snappishly, taking Emily's bonnet*]. Of course! [*She goes out quickly.*]

John [*to Ned*]. Well, you've got to be off then, for the moment. [*All are near the door now, except Emily, who is drawing off her gloves savagely.*]

Rose [*in a low voice to Ned*]. Till tea, then. [*She goes out, nodding her head significantly.*]

Ned [*hesitating*]. Yes. [*To John.*] But I must just kiss the hand of this new cousin of mine first.

John [*in a peculiar tone*]. Oh! All Right! [*He follows Rose.*]

Ned [*going up to Emily, whose face is turned away ingratiatingly*]. Now, I'm not included in this frown, am I?

Emily [*facing him and bursting out*]. But don't you think it's a shame, seriously?

Ned. Of course if you've *promised* Mr. Preece, and don't want to disappoint him ——

Emily [*with false lightness*]. Oh, Mr. Preece is nothing to me! Only I *do* want to know where I am. The fact is they let me do as I like in little things, and they're frightfully severe in big things. Not really big things, but — you know ——

Ned. Middling big things.

Emily. After all I'm twenty-two.

Ned. A mature age.

Emily [*huffily*]. Oh! Naturally you take their side!

Ned. Honour bright, I don't! I tell you I feel far more like your age than theirs. I'm much younger than your father — much! That's why I don't like being called uncle.

Emily. Really?

Ned. Really.

Emily [*confidentially*]. And there's another thing. They oughtn't to treat Auntie Gertrude like that, ought they? She's got more brains than anybody else here.

Ned. Than your father?

Emily. No, not than father. I meant mother, and Uncle Sam, and me — and you ——

Ned. I see.

Emily. Who is it runs the house? You don't suppose it's mother, do you? Mother is absorbed in father, quite absorbed in him. No! It's auntie does everything. And yet she's nobody, simply nobody. She arranges to take me out, and they stop it without so much as apologising to her.

Ned. Well, you see, she's an old maid.

Emily. I don't care whether she's an old maid or not. She's the only friend I have. Father and mother are most awfully fond of me and all that, and mother *is* sweet, isn't she? But still that makes no difference. There are two camps in this house; they're in one, and auntie and I are in the other. And I tell you we have to be regular conspirators, in self-defence. Of course I'm trusting you.

Ned [*who has been playing with a book he has picked up from a table*]. You may.

Emily. For instance, they won't let me read Ouida. They don't even like auntie to read Ouida.

Ned. This isn't Ouida.

Emily. I know it isn't. That's William Black. They're always throwing William Black at me, and I hate him. I want to read Ouida.

Ned. You must wait till you're married.

Emily. I won't. And I do so want to go to the Hotel Métropole.

Ned. I thought it was the Royal Academy.

Emily. The Academy too.

Ned. Look here, Emily. Suppose I arrange a little theatre party?

Emily. Not with father and mother. They'll want to go to something silly.

Ned. No. Just your auntie and me — and you, of course.

Emily. Will you?

Ned. Rather!

Emily. You're quite coming out. But will they allow it?

Ned. You bet they will.

Emily. Where?

Ned. Anywhere you like.

Emily. Do you know "The Mikado's" been running three months, and I haven't seen it yet?

Ned. "Here's a 'How d'you do!'" The Savoy then.

Emily. Oh! Hurrah! Hurrah! Thanks; you are a dear.

Ned [*pleased*]. Am I? That's all right then. Au revoir. [*Turns to the door.*]

Emily [*calling him back*]. Cousin! [*She beckons him to come to her.*] What's this secret between you and father and mother?

Ned. What secret?

Emily [*crossly*]. Now you needn't pretend. I could see it as plain as anything when I came in. And when they went out too, for that matter.

Ned. I can't stand being bullied.

Emily. Tell me, and I won't bully you.

Ned [*solemnly*]. You're going to be related to a baronet.

Emily [*disturbed*]. They don't want me to marry a baronet, do they?

Ned. Foolish creature! No. It's the opposite camp that's about to receive a title.

Emily [*delighted*]. Father — a baronet!

Ned. I'm just off to make the final arrangements now.

Emily. Truly?

Ned. Don't be misled by my modest exterior. I'm a terrific nob — really. [*He turns to go.*]

Emily [*as he is going*]. Didn't you say something about kissing my hand? One of your jokes, I suppose. [*Ned comes and kisses it, then hurries to the door. As he opened it he looks back and says "The Mikado," and hurries out. Emily*

stands a moment lost in thought, a smile on her lips. Then she hums, quite unconsciously, "For he's going to marry Yum-Yum, Yum-Yum!" Goes back to the table on which the William Black is lying, picks it up — opens it, reading a bit, then flings the book aside, muttering in disgust, "Black!" Thompson enters. He has grown old in the service of the Rheads.]

Thompson [*announcing*]. Mr. Preece. [*He withdraws. Arthur Preece enters. His age is twenty-five; he is a man of the clerk class, whose talent and energy have made him what he is. He is full of enthusiasm, earnest, but with a rough sense of humour. Rather short and stocky in figure, but important. His clothes are neat and useful — but very simple.*]

Preece [*excited*]. Good afternoon, Miss Rhead. I'm afraid I'm a little early.

Emily [*putting on the manner of a woman of the world*]. Not at all, Mr. Preece. I'm sure Auntie Gertrude will be delighted.

Preece [*vaguely*]. She's not here now, your aunt?

Emily [*looking round*]. No.

Preece [*eagerly*]. I wonder if I should have time to tell you something before she comes in. It isn't that it's a secret. But nobody knows yet, and I should like you to be the first.

Emily. How very kind of you, Mr. Preece!

Preece. I've only just known it myself.

Emily. It seems to be very thrilling.

Preece. It is, rather. It's just this. I've succeeded in making mild steel nearly five per cent. lighter than it's ever been made before. Nearly five per cent. lighter, and no extra cost.

Emily. Really! How much is five per cent.?

Preece. It's one-twentieth part. You know, it's enormous.

Emily. I suppose it is.

Preece. I dare say you don't quite realise what it means — this enormous change in the specific gravity. But it *is* enormous.

Emily. What is specific gravity? In a word?

Preece. It's — well — Now supposing — Do you mind if I explain that to you some other time? I'd like to, awfully!

Emily. Oh! Any time!

Preece. It's quite O.K., you know. And the thing comes to this. Assume the steel for a biggish ship cost £20,000. Under my new process you'd get the same result with steel that weighed about a twentieth less and cost, roughly, £19,000. Net saving of nearly one thousand pounds!

Emily [*impressed*]. And did you ——

Preece [*continuing*]. And not only that. As the hull weighs so much less, you can carry a proportionately heavier cargo in the same bottom.

Emily. Well, I never heard of such a thing! And am I really the first to know?

Preece. You are.

Emily. And you found out this all alone?

Preece. Oh, yes! Except the manager, nobody has any idea of what I've been experimenting on.

Emily. Not even father?

Preece. No.

Emily. I suppose he knows you *are* experimenting.

Preece. Of course. That's my job. That's what he took me out of the drawing office for. I'm always experimenting on something.

Emily. I expect you're what they call an inventor.

Preece [*humorously*]. I expect I am. [*Eagerly*]. I'd practically finished this experiment a week ago. But I had to make sure whether there was any manganese left in the steel. I've been getting a friend at the City and Guilds of London Institute to analyse it for me — you know, the big, red building in Exhibition Road. I've just come from there.

Emily. So *that* was your business in the West End? [*Preece nods.*] I'm sure auntie and I hadn't an idea it was anything half so romantic.

Preece. It *is* romantic, isn't it?

Emily. No wonder you're so excited.

Preece. Am I? Well, I don't care! It's all right. That's all I care about. Here's a bit of the steel now. [*He offers her a small sample.*]

Emily. Is it for me? May I keep it?

Preece. I want you to.

Emily. Rather a strange thing for a girl to keep, isn't it?

Preece. You don't mind ——

Emily. I'd part with all my jewellery before I parted with this. D'you know, it makes me feel very proud. And when I think of poor old father not knowing *anything* about it ——

Preece. I shall tell him to-morrow if he can spare time to see me.

Emily. Spare time to see *you* — why?

Preece. Oh! you don't know, but Mr. Rhead's a sort of crowned head on the works. You can't walk into his office as if it was a public-house, I can tell you.

Emily. But it's so important for him.

Preece. Rather! Much more important for him than for me.

Emily. Why?

Preece. Under our agreement! Our agreement has five years to run yet, and during that time everything I do belongs to the firm. I only get a percentage on whatever my inventions bring in.

Emily. What percentage?

Preece. Ten. For every hundred pounds profit I get ten pounds and the firm gets ninety.

Emily. But what a frightful shame! It ought to be the other way about — you ninety pounds and the firm ten.

Preece. Oh, no! It's fair enough — really!

They pay me a very good salary. And you must remember if Mr. Rhead hadn't taken me out of the drawing office, I should be there now getting two pounds a week!

Emily. I don't care! I think it's a frightful shame. I shall tell father.

Preece [*half playfully*]. Please don't, unless you want to ruin me with him. I owe just about everything to your father.

Emily. But it's so horridly unfair.

Preece. Oh, no! I assure you. I shall have all the money I want, and more. And it will always be *my* invention. That's the point.

Emily. Then you don't care for money?

Preece. Yes, I do. I want enough. In fact, I want a good deal. But what's interesting is to *do* things, and to do 'em better and quicker, and less clumsily than ever they were done before. If I can make nineteen tons of steel do the work of twenty — Well, I reckon I've accomplished something for the world.

Emily. I like that. It's very original.

Preece. Not my notion, you know. I'm a disciple of William Morris.

Emily. Oh! He's a poet, isn't he?

Preece. You should read "The Earthly Paradise."

Emily. I should love to.

Preece. If people would read a bit more William Morris, and less of these silly gim-crack novels

about lord and actresses — Ouida and so on — What's the matter?

Emily. Nothing. [*With a certain self-satisfaction*]. William Black's silly too, isn't he?

Preece. Of course.

Emily [*firmly*]. I'm going to read "The Earthly Paradise."

Preece. Let me lend it you. I've got a signed copy, from the author.

Emily. You know an author!

Preece. I know William Morris. I was up at his stable last night.

Emily. His stable?

Preece. He gives lectures in a stable behind his house at Hammersmith. I wish you'd heard him pitching into the House of Lords. "A squad of dukes."

Emily. But why?

Preece. Oh, because they aren't interested in the right thing.

Emily. What is the right thing?

Preece. The right thing is to make the world fit to live in.

Emily. But isn't it?

Preece. Have you ever been to the East End?

Emily. I did some slumming once, just to see. But I was so ashamed to go into their awful houses, that I never tried again.

Preece [*getting up, excited*]. That's grand! That's grand! That's just how I feel. Every-

one feels like that that's got any imagination and any sense of justice. We *ought* to be ashamed of the East End. At least the governing classes ought. Not for the poor, but for themselves. They ought to go and get buried if they can't govern better than that.

Emily [*after a pause, rising as in thought; moved*]. But how are you going to change it?

Preece. Not by slumming, that's a certainty. You can only change it by getting some decent laws passed, and by playing fair, and doing your job, and thinking a great deal less about eating and drinking, and fine clothes, and being in the swim and all that sort of nonsense. Do you know what I am going to do as soon as I can afford? I'm going to be a Member of Parliament.

Emily [*low*]. Why did you offer to take us to the Hotel Métropole?

Preece [*confused*]. I thought you'd like it. I — I ——

Emily. You despise it yourself.

Preece. I'm human.

Emily. But —— [*She draws close to him*].

Preece. I'm very ambitious. I want a whole lot of things. But if I thought I could find someone — find a woman, who — who feels as I feel; who'd like before everything to help to make the world decent — I'd ——

Emily. I —— [*Profoundly stirred, she falls into his arms.*]

Preece. Emily! [*He kisses her long, holding her close.*]

Emily [*gently releases herself and walks away. With effort*]. I haven't told you. I forgot. Father doesn't wish me to go out with you this afternoon. He's here now, in the study. [*Gertrude enters from the hall, without her bonnet this time.*]

Gert. Good afternoon, Mr. Preece. [*They shake hands. To Emily.*] I suppose you — er — told Mr. Preece that the excursion is countermanded? [*She goes to the fireplace.*]

Emily. Yes, Mr. Preece was just going. [*Gently.*] Good afternoon. [*She holds out her hand to Preece, who hesitates. Emily repeats in firmer tone.*] Good afternoon. [*In a tender voice.*] Please! [*With a smile.*] Another time! [*Preece shakes hands and, bowing to Gertrude, retires. As he departs Gertrude rings the bell by the fireplace.*]

Gert. Well, I've been catching it, I can tell you!

Emily [*shaken*]. What about?

Gert. About you. They simply asked me to go into the study so that I could be talked to — for your good, my girl.

Emily. They weren't rude, were they?

Gert. You know your mother's always almost most considerate. She's an angel. But your father rubbed it in finely. How many times had

you seen the young man? — If ever alone? — What on earth was I thinking of? — What on earth was your mother doing to have noticed nothing? (As if your mother ever noticed anything!) And so on! Of course, I told them pretty straight that they were making a most ridiculous fuss about nothing.

Emily. Well, anyhow, I've let him kiss me.

Gert. You've let him kiss you? When?

Emily. Just now. Here.

Gert. But what ——

Emily. Don't ask me. I don't know, I really don't. But I've felt it coming for some time.

Gert. Do you mean to say he walked in here and proposed to you straight off, and you accepted him?

Emily. I didn't accept him, because he didn't propose. He was talking about his ideas.

Gert. What ideas?

Emily [*with a vague gesture*]. Oh, about the world in general, and all that he means to do. He's made another marvellous invention, only no one knows except me. It was the excited way he talked — somehow — I couldn't help it — before I knew what we were doing, he'd got his arms round me.

Gert. [*rather sternly, in spite of her tender feeling*]. Well, Emily, I must say I'm very surprised.

Emily. So am I.

Gert. Of course you're engaged to him?

Emily. Am I?

Gert. And it'll be all my fault. However, it's got to be seen through to the end now.

Emily. He has very strange ideas. They sound splendid when he's explaining them. But d'you know, he thinks Ouida's silly.

Gert. Does he?

Emily. And he really doesn't care about money and fashion and all that sort of thing. He despises going to the Hotel Métropole. He only offered to go there because he thought it would please our horrid little minds — I was so ashamed.

Gert. But surely you knew all this before — at least you guessed it?

Emily. I didn't, auntie. I never thought about his ideas, never! I just ——

Gert. You just simply fell into his arms as soon as you heard them, that's all. Well, surely in that case, you must admire these ideas of his tremendously. [*She sits in an armchair.*]

Emily. I don't know. Yes. I *admire* them, but ——

Gert. Listen, young woman! Are you in love with him, or aren't you?

Emily. I — I —— How can you tell whether you're in love with a man or not?

Gert. Supposing you were alone with him here, now — would you let him kiss you again? [*Pause.*]

Emily. I ——

Gert. Now, out with it!

Emily. I shouldn't be able to stop him, should I?

Gert. That's enough.

Emily. Yes. But then what about father? He would be frightfully angry, I can see that. Oh, I do hate unpleasantness, auntie. And Mr. Preece's ideas are really very peculiar.

Gert [*after a look at Emily*]. Listen, Emily! I was once engaged to be married.

Emily. Oh, auntie! I always knew you must have been. Do tell me. Who was it?

Gert. Your Uncle Sam.

Emily [*staggered*]. Not Uncle Sam?

Gert. You're surprised, naturally. But you mustn't be too hard. Remember it was twenty-five years ago, Uncle Sam was a splendid fellow then. He's old now. We're all old, except you — and Mr. Preece. You've got the only thing worth having, you two.

Emily [*sitting at Gertrude's feet*]. What's that?

Gert. Youth. Your Uncle Sam lived the miserable life of a bachelor till he was fifty. He'd have been a very different man if I'd married him. And I should have been a very different woman.

Emily. Why did you break it off?

Gert. I broke it off because there were difficulties; and because I thought his ideas were peculiar; and because I hated unpleasantness! And

now look at me! Couldn't I have ruled a house and a family? Couldn't I have played the hostess? [*In another tone.*] To-day the one poor little joy I have in life is to pretend I'm your mother. Look at my position here. I'm only ——

Emily [*passionately*]. Oh, auntie, don't! I can't bear to hear you say it. I know!

Gert. We were opposite in every way, your uncle and I, but I — I loved him.

Emily [*softly*]. Do you still love him, auntie?

Gert. [*in a flat tone of despair*]. No! Love dies out.

Emily [*after a moment*]. Why didn't you marry somebody else?

Gert. There *was* nobody else. There never is anybody else when you've made the mistake I made. Marry! I could have chosen among a dozen men! But they were all the wrong men. Emily! Fancy pouring out tea every day of your life for the wrong man. Every breakfast time — every afternoon! And there he sits, and nothing will move him. Think of that, Emily — think of that. [*A pause.*]

Emily [*embracing her again*]. Oh, auntie! *I* love you awfully!

Gert. You must show some courage, my girl. Don't be afraid of anything — and especially not of arguments and threats. What does unpleasantness matter, after all? It's over in a month; but a mistake lasts for ever.

Emily. You'll help me?

Gert. That's all I live for. [*She kisses Emily tenderly.*] Is that Sam's voice? [*Thompson enters.*]

Thompson [*announcing*]. Mr. and Mrs. Sibley. [*He retires.*] [*Samuel Sibley and his wife Nancy enter. Samuel, who is now fifty-three, has grown into a rather flabby nonentity, grey-haired with longish side whiskers and glasses. His manner is important and fussy. Nancy is a buxom, Yorkshire woman of thirty-two, round-faced, good-natured, full of energy. She wears the fashionable jersey of* 1885 *and a very definite "bustle."*]

Sam. Well, Gertrude? Well, my little Emmie! [*He kisses Emily, who gives her cheek unwillingly; then shakes hands with Gertrude.*]

Gert. How are you, Sam; and you, Mrs. Sam?

Nancy. Nicely, thank you! [*Shaking hands vigorously with Gertrude and Emily.*] Everybody well, here?

Emily. Yes, thank you.

Nancy. That's fine! Then your mother got Sam's letter saying we were coming?

Emily [*drily*]. Oh, yes!

Nancy. I said to Sam it would happen be best to write and tell you. So he wrote — [*with a look at Sam*] — finally.

Sam [*with a serious tone*]. We nearly didn't come.

Gert. Anything wrong?

Sam. Infant's temperature up at a hundred last night. However, it was normal this morning.

Nancy. You know he takes the baby's temperature every night.

Emily. Oh, do you, uncle? How funny!

Sam. I don't see anything funny about it, niece. Good thing if some parents took their responsibilities a bit more seriously.

Nancy. I must say Sam makes a very good father.

Gert. Let me see — how old is Dickie now?

Sam. We never call him Dickie — Richard, better; less nonsensical. [*He settles down solemnly in a chair.*]

Nancy. You've no idea what I call him when you're not there, Sam! [*To Gertrude.*] He was two on the second of this month. He talks like anything! You ought to see him and his father together. It's killing! The little thing's so *exactly* like Sam.

Emily [*examining Sam*]. Is he? We must go down to Brockley, mustn't we, auntie?

Nancy [*drily*]. I've been expecting you for the better part of some time. [*Then cordially.*] I should love you to come as soon as I've got a new cook. [*With emphasis.*] Oh, my!

Gert. Are you having trouble?

Nancy. Trouble's not the word. And as for the nurse-maid! If it wasn't for Sam being free ——

Gert. D'you take your share, Sam?

Nancy. By the hour he wheels that child up and down.

Emily. Not in the street?

Sam. Why not, niece? Anything to be ashamed of in being a father?

Nancy. That's what we came up for to-day, to buy a new perambulator. He did try to repair the other in the little workshop he's made himself at the end of the garden — and most useful he is for odd jobs. Upon my word, he's busy from morning to night! But we thought it better to buy a new pram altogether.

Sam [*discontented*]. Nancy would insist on having one of those new things with indiarubber tyres, as they call them.

Nancy [*very definitely*]. Now, Sam. I thought we'd done with that question.

Sam. Yes; but rubber tyres on gravel paths! It's obvious they'll not last a ——

Nancy. I told you Mrs. Caton across the road told me ——

Sam. Oh, very well! Very well! Only it's very light and flimsy.

Emily [*restless*]. I think I'll go and tell father and mother you're here. [*Going towards the door.*]

Nancy [*rising, very convinced*]. Come and see for yourself what you think of the pram and the rubber tyres.

Emily [*rising.*] Is it here?

Nancy. Yes, in the hall.

Sam. I deemed it imprudent to let them send it down by train. So we brought it away on the roof of a four-wheeler.

Emily [*patronisingly*]. Well, let's go and inspect it, Aunt Nancy. [*Emily and Nancy go off.*]

Gert. [*waiting till the door is closed; in low, quiet tones*]. Sam, I'm so glad you've come. There's going to be another tragedy in this house, if some of us don't do something.

Sam. *Another* tragedy? What do you mean?

Gert. I just mean a tragedy. That child's head over heels in love with young Arthur Preece, at the works, and John simply won't hear of it.

Sam. Why?

Gert. [*shrugs her shoulders*]. Why, indeed? Sam, if there's any discussion while you're here I want you to help me all you can.

Sam. But really, Gertrude, how can I meddle in an affair like that? I have my own responsibilities.

Gert. Sam, it's many years since I asked the slightest favour of you.

Sam [*moved, friendly*]. Come, come. Don't go so far back as all that. We're all very comfortable as we are, I think. [*The door opens.*]

Gert. [*quick and low*]. But will you? You've got more influence than I have.

Sam [*low*]. All right. [*Pats her arm.*] All right. [*Enter Rose and John.*]

John [*coming up to Sam a little patronisingly*]. Sam, glad to see you! How's the precious family getting on? Any new trouble lately?

Sam [*a little sharply*]. Oh, no! And what about yours? [*In a significant, bantering tone.*] Any new trouble lately?

John. Mine? Trouble? No!

Rose [*kissing Sam fondly*]. Your wife's here?

Sam. She's downstairs somewhere ——

John [*interrupting sharply*]. Where's Emily?

Gert. She's just gone with Mrs. Sam to look at a new ——

John [*interrupting again*]. Preece hasn't been, has he?

Gert. He's been and gone.

John. Were you here?

Gert. I was here part of the time.

John. You ought to have been here all the time. What did you tell him?

Gert. Emily told him you wished us to stay at home this afternoon.

John [*nodding curtly*]. So much for that.

Sam. So even *you* are not quite without 'em, Jack?

John. Not quite without what?

Sam. Family troubles.

John. What in heaven's name are you driving at?

Sam. Nothing. I only gathered from your tone that Preece was considered — er — dangerous.

John [*hedging*]. Oh, no! I'm merely taking precautions. Preece is an excellent fellow in his way — brilliant even.

Sam. But you wouldn't care for him as a son-in-law.

John [*positively*]. I should not.

Rose [*shaking her head*]. No!

Sam. I've always understood he had a great career before him.

John. So he has, undoubtedly. You should see what he's got me to do at the works. Made me instal the telephone. And his latest is that he wants me to put down an electric light plant. What do you think of that?

Sam. He must be very enthusiastic.

Gert. I should think he just is!

John. Why, the boy's invention mad. He thinks of nothing else.

Sam. Well, if you ask me I'd sooner have that kind of madness than most kinds I meet with. Seems to me people have gone mad on bicycles or banjo-playing or this lawn-tennis, as it's called. It was different in our day, Jack, when young men took an interest in volunteering and the defence of their country. I've quite decided when our boy grows up ——

Gert. [*putting a hand on Sam's arm*]. Sam! —

Emily may be back any moment. We were talking about Arthur Preece.

Sam. So we were. [*Turns again to John.*] Well, Jack ——

John [*annoyed*]. Look here, Sam — I don't mind being frank with you. Her mother and I have somebody else in view for Emily.

Sam. Oh!

Gert. [*bitterly*]. I thought as much. [*A slight pause.*]

John [*carelessly to Sam*]. Have you heard I'm going to have a title?

Sam. No! What title?

John. Baronet.

Gert. [*quickly*]. You never told me.

Rose [*soothingly*]. It only came out this afternoon, Gertrude dear.

Sam. Oh — ho.

John [*still with an affectation of carelessness*]. And what's more, Emily can marry — under the very happiest auspices — into the peerage. That's why we don't want her to see too much of young Preece.

Sam. And may one ask who is the Peer?

John. Monkhurst, of course.

Sam. Ned!

Gert. Ned?

Rose. Wouldn't it be ideal, Sam!

Sam. He's keen — Ned?

John. Very! Put that in your pipe and smoke

it, my boy. [*Emily and Nancy re-enter rather suddenly. All the others have a self-conscious air.*]

John [*rather negligently*]. Well, Nancy. How are you? It seems the infant's grown out of his pram. [*Shakes hands.*]

Nancy [*rather proud of being able to call the great man "John" and yet trying not to be proud*]. Glad to see you, John. [*Rose and Nancy embrace. An awkward pause.*]

Emily [*with suspicion*]. What's the matter here? More secrets?

Gert. [*in an outburst*]. It's being arranged that you are to marry Lord Monkhurst.

John [*nonplussed, coldly angry*]. Gertrude, are you stark staring mad — blurting things out like that?

Rose [*shocked*]. Gertrude, dear — really!

Gert. [*firmly*]. She'd better know, hadn't she?

John. You ——

Nancy [*blandly*]. Well, anyhow, the fat's in the fire now, isn't it, John?

John [*turning to Nancy*]. Sorry you've been let in for a bit of a scene, Nancy.

Nancy [*cheerfully*]. Oh! Don't mind me. I know what family life is — my word! I'm from Yorkshire! Best to have it out fair and square — that's my experience.

Sam. That's what she always says when the

infant's obstreperous. Why, the night before last, just as we were getting off to sleep ——

John. There's nothing to have out!

Gert. Oh, yes, there is. Emily's in love with Arthur Preece.

John. What's this?

Emily [*very nervous; to Gertrude*]. What do you mean — it's being arranged for me to marry Lord Monkhurst? Me — marry old Ned!

John. He's not old.

Emily. Isn't he old enough to be my father?

John. Certainly not.

Sam [*mischievously*]. I doubt it.

John [*turning on him*]. You're the last man to talk about difference of age between husband and wife.

Rose [*smoothing over the awkwardness*]. But you're very happy, aren't you, dear?

Sam. Naturally.

Nancy. I don't see that age matters — so long as people really fancy each other. I'm sure Sam gets younger every day.

John. Of course! [*Turning to Emily angrily.*] What's this tale about you being in love with Preece?

Emily. I ——

John. Has he been proposing to you?

Emily. No.

John [*disdainfully*]. Then how can you be in love with him?

Emily [*resenting his tone*]. Well, I *am* in love with him, if you want to know, father.

John. You have the audacity ——

Nancy. Come, John, it's not a crime.

John. Preece is not of our class at all. It's a gross mistake to marry out of your class.

Nancy [*bantering*]. Now, John, that's not very tactful, seeing that Sam married out of *his* class.

Sam. Don't be foolish, Nan! I married a lady. Even a marquis couldn't do more.

John. My dear Nancy, you belong to the family — that's enough! Preece is quite a different affair. Just a common clerk until I ——

Emily. I can't see what more you want. He has the most beautiful manners, and, as for money, he'll make lots.

John. How will he make lots?

Emily. With his inventions. You haven't heard about his latest. But I have. He's told me. Here it is. [*Hands piece of steel to her father.*]

John [*taking it*]. And what's this?

Emily. I don't know exactly. But it's very wonderful. It's steel, I think — a new kind.

John [*drily*]. Yes. I see it's steel.

Emily. And I think it's a great shame for you to take nine-tenths of all the money from his inventions, and for *him* to only have one-tenth.

John [*flashing up*]. What? Has he been whining to you in that style?

Emily [*passionately*]. No, he hasn't been

whining to me in that style. He hasn't been whining at all. He thought it was quite fair. It only came out by pure accident, and I promised I'd never breathe a word. You must forget what I've said.

John. I'll teach him ——

Emily [*more passionately*]. If you ever say a single thing, father, I'll run away and never come back.

Rose. Child! please! [*She tries to soothe her.*]

Sam [*to calm the stress*]. Hand over, Jack. [*Takes the piece of steel and looks at it.*] I fully admit I was wrong about iron. But even *you* won't prophesy that steel's going to take the place of iron for ships!

John [*shortly*]. I don't think it is in *my* works. But, as for prophesying — I don't prophesy. Heavens knows no one can accuse me of being conservative in my ideas. But I must say the new generation seems to be going clean off its head. If one of these up-to-date inventors came along and told me he'd made a flying-machine, I should keep my nerve. I shouldn't blench.

Sam. Good! Good!

Gert. Now you're at flying-machines! What have flying-machines got to do with Emily's happiness? If she wants to marry young Preece ——

Emily. Yes, if I want to marry him, why shouldn't I?

Rose. Because your father objects.

Emily. Oh, mother. Didn't you marry father, in spite of everyone?

John. Who's told you that?

Emily. I know. [*General glances at Gertrude.*]

Rose [*indignant*]. Do you mean to compare young Preece with your father?

Emily. Why not? You loved father, and I ——

John. I'll tell you why not. I was independent. I was my own master. Young Mr. Preece isn't. That's why.

Gert. [*sarcastically*]. Surely it's a free country — for men!

John. It's not a country where honest men break their contracts. Young Preece can't patent an invention without me. Can't do anything without me. If I like, I can force him to mark time for five years, five solid years.

Emily. Does that mean that if I married him in spite of you ——

Rose [*horrified*]. Child! Well may you say we've spoilt you!

John [*calmly*]. It means that if he had the impudence to marry you, I'd scotch him — *that* I would.

Emily. But why? Who's going to suffer? How can my marriage affect anybody but me?

John. Don't talk like a little fool. Your mar-

riage is the most important thing in the whole world to your mother and me. And if you persist in doing something against our will, I shall retaliate — that's all.

Emily [*with a despairing gesture*]. I can't make out your objections to Mr. Preece. Why, he's a genius; everyone *knows* he's a genius.

John. And what if he is? Are geniuses to be the kings of the earth? Not quite! Geniuses have to be kept in order like criminals. If there's one thing above all to be said in favour of the English character, it is that we've known the proper way to treat geniuses.

Sam. I'm inclined to agree with you there.

John [*to Emily*]. Oh, it isn't Preece's class I object to. He's presentable enough. The whole truth is he's a highly dangerous sort of young man we're breeding in these days. He — he makes you feel — uncomfortable. On the works, under discipline, admirable. Outside the works — no, no! And no! I've been following Master Preece's activities far more closely than he thinks. He little guesses I know he's a Socialist!

Sam. A Socialist! Good God! Gertrude, you never told me that. A Socialist!

Gert. Why are men always so frightened by names?

John. A Socialist. [*To Emily, an ultimatum.*] And I don't intend you to marry him. If you do, you ruin him. That's the long and short

of it. Now, Emily, have we heard the last of Preece — or not?

Rose [*to Emily*]. Darling!

Gert. I really think you ought ——

John [*curtly*]. Pardon me, Gertrude. This isn't your affair. It's my daughter's.

Gert. [*to Emily*]. Your father is right. It's your affair. It depends solely on you.

Emily [*weeping imploringly*]. What am I to do, auntie? [*Gertrude turns away with a movement of pain and disgust.*]

Emily. I don't want to make everybody miserable.

Gert. [*reproachfully*]. Oh, Emily!

Emily. I couldn't stand — in Mr. Preece's light! I couldn't.

John. There! There! Of course you couldn't.

Rose [*comforting her*]. My poor lamb!

John. And don't go and suppose I want to compel you to marry Monkhurst — or anybody. You're absolutely free.

Gert. [*sniffs audibly*]. H'm!

John [*glaring at Gertrude to Emily*]. Only, as your aunt *has* dragged in his name, I don't see any harm in telling you this much. He adores you We all like him. His wife will have a position second to none in London Society. But don't let that influence you. Take him or refuse him as you please; your mother and I won't complain.

Rose. Indeed we sha'n't, my love.

John. Still a marriage like this is not to be sneezed at. Is it, Emily? [*Pause.*] I say, *is* it?

Emily [*trying to smile; weakly*]. No.

John [*continuing*]. Not that I think it wouldn't be a big slice of luck for Monkhurst, too! There's only one Emily! [*He pats her.*] And then my title ——

Nancy. Your title, John?

John [*carelessly*]. Haven't you heard?

Nancy. No!

John [*as above*]. Baronetcy!

Nancy [*staggered*]. Wonders 'll never cease. [*To Rose.*] What a pity you've got no son, dear!

Rose [*with a trace of bitterness*]. Don't crow over us, dear! [*She clasps Emily to her.*]

Sam [*with a sigh of regret for himself*]. Well, well! And I've retired into private life!

John [*surveying him patronisingly*]. And you've retired into private life. You're safe at Brockley. But then you see you hadn't got a bee in your bonnet.

Sam [*accepting the sarcasm with a foolish smile*]. Well, well!

Nancy [*sharply*]. I don't see that there's any need for so much well-welling.

John. Come and give your father a kiss, Em. [*Emily obeys.*]

Gert. [*rising as she does so, full of emotion*]. I —— [*Thompson enters followed by a Foot-*

man. They bring in tea. Gertrude pulls herself together. There is a slight pause while the Servants arrange the tea-things. They leave the room.]

Rose. Emily, dear, will you pour out?

Emily [*demurely*]. Yes, mother.

Rose. I hope Ned won't be late.

Nancy. Is Lord Monkhurst coming for tea?

Rose. He promised to.

Nancy. Oh, dear! If I'd known I was going to meet him —— [*She rises and arranges her bustle and the draperies of her skirt.*] I do hope he won't notice that pram. A pram in a hall looks so common. [*She reseats herself. Thompson enters.*]

Thompson [*announcing*]. Lord Monkhurst! [*He retires.*]

Gert. [*passionately*]. Here's your lord! [*Ned enters rapidly.*]

Ned. Well, kind friends. Hullo, Sam!

Sam. Hullo, Ned! [*They shake hands.*] By the way, my wife — Nancy, Lord Monkhurst. [*Nancy flustered, bows.*]

Ned [*going towards Emily*]. Delighted! Any of that tea for me?

Gert. [*with great feeling*]. And there's your tea — your daily tea, for the rest of your life.

John [*angrily*]. Gertrude!

Gert. No, I will speak! Ned, what would *you* do, if I told you that ——

Emily [*pleading*]. Aunt Gertrude, please ——

Gert. Emily?

Emily [*weakly*]. It's all right, auntie.

Gert. All right? Oh, very well! [*Desperately.*] What's the use! [*She turns and walks quickly out of the room.*]

Ned [*surprised at Gertrude's tone*]. What's the matter with dear Gertrude?

John. Nothing. One of her moods. [*Drawing up a chair, with authority.*] Now then, Emily,— tea!

[*Curtain.*]

ACT III

1912

The same drawing-room, but now in 1912, *it has undergone an entire change. All of the old mid-Victorian furniture has been crowded out by furniture of later style. Changes of ornaments, etc. The lights are electric; so is the bell by the fireplace.*

It is a June evening, about half-past ten at night. Signs of festivity — flowers, presents [*in gold*] *are standing about. It is the evening of the Golden Wedding of John and Rose.* [*Webster, a smart, military-looking butler of forty, is arranging a tray of whiskey and soda. The door to the hall opens, and a Footman enters.*]

Footman [*announcing*]. Lord Monkhurst. [*He withdraws.*] [*Lord Monkhurst enters. He is a young man about town of twenty-two, tall, hollow-chested, careless in his manners, very self-assured and properly bored.*]

Monk. I say, Webster.

Webster. Good evening, my lord.

Monk. [*cheerfully*]. I suppose dinner's over?

Webster [*looking at his watch*]. It's half-past ten, my lord.

Monk. Of course, they'll all say I'm late for dinner.

Webster. Oh, no, my lord. Shall I order some dinner for your lordship?

Monk. No. Who's here now?

Webster. Lady Monkhurst and Miss Muriel; Miss Rhead, Mrs. Samuel Sibley, and Mr. Richard Sibley.

Monk. Yes. I know *he's* here. Many people at the reception this afternoon?

Webster. Droves, my lord.

Monk. I suppose these ghastly things are the presents?

Webster. As your lordship says.

Monk. Dashed if I can understand why my grandfather should make such a fuss about his golden wedding. [*Very cheerfully.*] Was he very angry at me not turning up?

Webster. Considering his age, no, my lord. I took the liberty of suggesting to him that this might be one of your busy weeks, my lord, and that your lordship could never tell beforehand ——

Monk. You're a clever chap, Webster. Why the devil did you leave the army?

Webster. Probably because, as your lordship says, I'm clever. There's more brains outside the army than in it, my lord. And like turns to like.

Monk. [*laughing in a superior way*]. Ha! ha! Really!

Webster. Fact is, I enlisted under a misapprehension, when I was in a temper. I have to thank your lordship's late father for helping me to reenter my old profession, and under the most auspicious circumstances.

Monk. Well, we could do with more fellahs like you. I've not yet found any serjeant to draw my sketch maps for me half as well as you used to. [*He is looking over the tray with drinks.*]

Webster. Ah, my lord! Those half-guineas came in very handy, very handy. Glorious times, no doubt. But I wouldn't go back.

Monk. Bring me a benedictine, will you? [*Emily, now Lady Monkhurst, forty-eight, enters by the double doors. She has developed into a handsome, well-preserved woman of the world. She wears an evening dress of rich brocade, and magnificent pearls.*]

Monk. Well, mater, I don't see much sign of the fatted calf.

Emily [*annoyed*]. Gerald, your poor father was witty; you are merely facetious. I wish you could cure yourself.

Monk. Now, what's the matter now?

Emily. What's the matter? You must needs choose your grandparents' golden wedding to go to Sandown. You promised me you'd be back early, at any rate in time for the tail end of the

reception; and you don't even appear for dinner. Your grandfather is very displeased.

Monk. If a fellow keeps a stable, he keeps a stable. Somebody's got to look after the gees in these days. And then —— [*Hesitates.*]

Emily. Please don't tell me your car broke down. I've heard that too often.

Monk. It didn't — this time.

Emily. Have you dined?

Monk. I have.

Emily. Whom with? [*Silence.*] One of your numerous "lady friends," I presume. Gerald, I'm ashamed of you.

Monk. You've no right to be ashamed of me. If you want to know, I dined at the House of Lords.

Emily. At the House of Lords?

Monk. At the House of Lords. They telephoned to me at Sandown to come up for an important division, and I was kept hanging about there till aften ten o'clock. Jolly amusing place, the House of Lords.

Emily [*rather taken aback*]. Why didn't you tell me at first?

Monk. Because I just wanted to teach you a lesson, mater. You're always ragging me about something or other.

Emily. You might at least have telephoned.

Monk. When a chap's doing his duty to his country, he can't always think about telephoning.

Emily. My dear Gerald, if you mean to follow in your father's footsteps, nobody will be more delighted than your mother. There'd be nothing to prevent you from being Master of the Horse, if you chose. Only, my chick ——

Monk. Only your what?

Emily. You must alter your manner of living.

Monk. My manner of living, my dear mater, is my own affair. [*With meaning.*] If you'd leave me alone, and look after your other "chick" a little bit more ——

Emily. What do you mean? Muriel?

Monk. Precisely. The Honourable Muriel.

Emily. Why?

Monk. Oh! I know Muriel can do no wrong. Still, I spotted her at the top of the stairs just now practically in the arms of the good Richard.

Emily. Richard!

Monk. [*intoning*]. And Samuel took to wife Nancy, and begat Richard. And Samuel passed away in the fulness of years and his son Richard reigned in his stead. And Richard looked upon Muriel, and lo! she was beautiful in the eyes of Richard ——

Emily. Hush, Gerald! Aren't you mistaken? I've never seen the slightest thing ——

Monk. That shows how blind you are, then! Of course I'm not mistaken.

Emily. Are you sure?

Monk. Do you take me for a fool, mater?

Emily [*positively*]. Richard, indeed! I shall put a stop to it.

Monk [*almost savagely*]. I should jolly well think you would. [*Enter Webster from the hall with a liqueur on a salver. Monkhurst takes it and drinks it slowly.*]

Emily. Webster, will you kindly ask Miss Muriel to come here?

Webster. Very good, my lady. [*He goes out. Monkhurst nods knowingly to his mother as if to say, "Now you'll see!" Nancy enters by the double doors. She has grown into a rather red-faced, plump, old woman of fifty-eight. She is good-natured, but is quick to retort. Her laugh is rather loud, her manner more definite than ever.*]

Nancy. Good evening, young man.

Monk. Good evening.

Nancy. So you've come at ——

Emily [*interrupting her*]. Aunt Nancy, I've just had to send for Muriel to come here.

Nancy. What's amiss?

Emily. I — well — I hardly like ——

Monk. Your excellent son Richard has been seen trying to kiss my sister.

Nancy. What was *she* doing?

Emily. Well, that's not the point.

Nancy. And supposing he *was* trying to kiss Muriel?

Emily. I must say, Aunt Nancy, you don't seem very surprised.

Nancy. Who *would* be? You invite young people to a golden wedding, and then you're startled when you catch 'em kissing. What else do you expect?

Emily. I expect a good deal else.

Nancy. Then you're likely to be disappointed. As a matter of fact, I knew Richard was going to kiss Muriel to-night.

Emily. Who told you?

Nancy. *He* did, of course. At least, he let out to me he was going to propose to her. He usually gets what he wants, you know.

Emily [*angrily surprised*]. H'm!

Monk. [*very definitely*]. He won't get what he wants this time.

Nancy. Oh?

Monk. You must see that my sister can't marry an engineer.

Nancy. Well — why not an engineer? What are *you?* I can tell you what you might have been, if you hadn't been born in the right bedroom: you might have been a billiard-marker. What have you done? Tell me a single thing you've done?

Monk. I've — oh! What tripe!

Emily. Really, Aunt Nancy ——

Nancy. Yes, my son *is* an engineer. And if

you want to know what sort of an engineer he is, go to Mr. Arthur Preece.

Monk. [*disdainfully*]. Who's Preece?

Nancy [*imitating his tone*]. Ask your mother who *Preece* is.

Emily [*self-consciously*]. Aunt Nancy!

Nancy [*continuing*]. You aren't old enough to remember Mr. Preece as an engineer, but, at any rate, you know he's in the House of Commons, whereas you're only in the House of Lords. And I'd like you to tell me where your grandfather'd have been last week with all his workmen on strike — but for Mr. Preece!

Monk. Oh, *that* Preece!

Nancy. Exactly. And it's that Preece that thinks the world of my son. My son's been out to Canada, and look how he got on in Winnipeg! And now he's going out again, whose capital is he taking but your grandfather's? I should like to see your grandfather trust *you* with thirty thousand pounds and a ticket to Canada.

Monk. I'm in no need of capital, thank ye.

Nancy. Lucky for you you aren't! My husband left me very badly off, poor man, but I could count on Richard. A pretty look-out for your mother if she'd had to count on you!

Emily [*impatient*]. Really, Aunt Nancy ——

Nancy [*nettled*]. Well, you leave my son alone. [*Enter from the hall Muriel and Richard.*

Muriel is a handsome girl of twenty-four, rather thin and eager with a high forehead, and with much distinction. She has herself under absolute control. Richard is a tall, broad, darkish fellow of twenty-seven, with a clean-shaven heavy face and rough hair. He is very taciturn.]

Emily. Muriel, it was you that I asked for.

Muriel [*quite calmly*]. We were both just coming to tell you.

Emily. Tell me what?

Muriel. We're engaged.

Emily. Does Richard leave you to say this to me?

Muriel. Well, you know he was never a great talker.

Richard. There it is — we're engaged.

Nancy [*to Muriel*]. How matter-of-fact you are, you girls, nowdays. [*She caresses Richard.*]

Muriel. Well, nobody seems strikingly enthusiastic here.

Emily. I should think not. I don't like these underhand ways.

Muriel. What underhand ways? Surely you didn't expect Richard to announce in advance the exact place and hour he was going to propose to me.

Emily. Please don't try to imitate your dear father. You're worse than Gerald sometimes.

Muriel. Oh, very well, mamma! What else?

Emily. Do you mean to tell me you're seri-

ously thinking of going out to Canada — to Winnipeg — for the rest of your days?

Muriel. Of course, mamma! I'm sure I shall be happier there than here.

Emily. You'll leave England?

Muriel. Certainly. Politics are much more satisfactory over there, except for woman's suffrage. All the questions that all the silly statesmen are still wrangling about here have been settled over there ages ago.

Emily. My poor girl!

Muriel. Mamma, I wish you wouldn't say "my poor girl."

Emily. What have politics to do with happiness?

Muriel. They have a great deal to do with mine. But, of course, what most attracts me is all those thousands of square miles of wheat fields, and Richard making reaping-machines for them. The day I first see one of Richard's new machines at work on a Canadian wheat-farm will be the happiest day of my life — except to-day.

Nancy [*amazed at these sentiments*]. Well, you're a caution.

Monk [*with disgust*]. Why not marry an agricultural implement while you're about it?

Richard [*threateningly*]. You shut up!

Muriel. But aren't you glad, mamma?

Emily. I can't discuss the matter now.

Muriel. But what is there to discuss?

Emily [*after a pause*]. Muriel, I tell you at once, both of you, I sha'n't allow this marriage.

Muriel. Not allow it? My poor mamma!

Monk. Certainly not.

Richard. I've told you to shut up once.

Emily. And your grandfather won't allow it, either.

Muriel. Of course, mamma, you and I have always been devoted to each other. You've made allowances for me, and I've made allowances for you. But you must please remember that we're in the year 1912. I've promised to marry Richard, and I shall marry him. There's no question of being "allowed." And if it comes to that, why shouldn't I marry him, indeed?

Emily. You — your father's daughter, to think of going out to Winnipeg as the wife of a — your place is in London.

Richard [*stiffening at the sight of trouble*]. But I say, Cousin Emily ——

Muriel [*gently, but firmly*]. Richard,— please. [*Turning to her mother.*] Mamma, you really do shock me. Just because I'm the Honourable Muriel Pym! [*Laughs.*] I won't say you're a snob, because everybody's a snob, in some way or other. But you don't understand the new spirit, not in the least — and I'm so sorry. Why! Hasn't it occurred to you even yet that the aristocracy racket's played out? [*Rose and John enter by the double doors. They have both grown*

very old, Rose being seventy-three and John seventy-seven. Rose has become short-sighted, white-haired and stoutish. John has grown a little deaf; his hair is thin, his eyes sunken, his complexion of wax, his features sharply defined. Gertrude follows them, now seventy-three. She has grown into a thin shrivelled old woman, erect, hard with a high, shrill voice and keen, clear eyes.]

Rose. Oh! It's here they seem to be collected. [*To Monkhurst.*] Is that you, Gerald? Wherever has the poor lamb been? [*She kisses him.*]

Monk. Grandma, congratulations. [*To John.*] Congratulations, sir.

John [*sternly*]. Is this what you call good manners, boy?

Monk. Sorry, sir. I was kept.

John [*sarcastically*]. Kept?

Monk. At the House of Lords. A division.

Muriel. Good Heavens! Break it to us gently. Has his grandma's lamb gone into politics?

Monk. [*haughtily, ignoring his sister*]. They telephoned me from headquarters. I thought you would prefer me ——

John. Certainly, my boy. [*Shakes his hand.*] You couldn't have celebrated our golden wedding in a fashion more agreeable to us than by recording your first vote in the House of Lords. Could he, granny?

Rose [*feebly*]. Bless us! Bless us!

John. What was the division?

Monk. [*mumbling*]. Er — the Trades Union Bill, sir. Third reading.

John [*not hearing*]. What did you say?

Monk. [*louder*]. Trades Union Bill, sir.

Muriel. Oh, my poor lamb! The Trades Union Bill division isn't to be taken till to-morrow!

Monk. [*hastily*]. What am I thinking of? It must have been the Extended Franchise Bill, then. . . . Anyhow, I voted.

John [*coughing*]. H'm! H'm!

Gert. [*drawing a shawl round her shoulders, fretfully*]. Couldn't we have that window closed?

Rose. Auntie Gertrude, how brave you are! I daren't have asked. I declare I'm a martyr to this ventilation in my old age.

Gert. I daresay I'm very old-fashioned, but when I was young we didn't try to turn a drawing-room into a park.

Rose [*to Richard, as he closes the window*]. Thank you, Richard.

John [*pettishly*]. Put a match to the fire, boy, and have done with it. [*Richard goes to the fireplace, kneels down, and lights the fire.*]

Gert. What's the matter, Emily?

Emily [*who has begun to weep*]. Oh, Auntie Gertrude!

Nancy [*soothingly*]. Come, come, Emily.

John. What's that? What's that?

Rose [*peering at Emily*]. What is it, John?

John. Monkhurst, have you been upsetting your mother again?

Muriel. I think it's *us*, grandpapa.

John. What does she say?

Muriel. I'm afraid it's us — Richard and me. We're engaged to be married. [*Muriel points to Richard, who is still on his knees busy with the fire.*]

Rose. Oh, my dear — how sudden! What a shock! What a shock! I can understand your mother crying. I must cry myself. Come and kiss me! It's astonishing how quietly you young people manage these things nowadays. [*Embraces Muriel.*]

John. Who's engaged to be married? Who's engaged to be married?

Richard [*loudly, rising and dusting his hands*]. Muriel and I, sir.

John. Mu — Mu ——! What the devil do you mean, sir? Emily, what in God's name are you thinking of?

Emily [*whimpering*]. It's just as much of a surprise to me as to anybody. I don't approve of it.

Monk. I've told them already you would never approve, sir.

Nancy. You haven't, young man. It was your mother who told us that.

John [*to Nancy*]. I asked you to my golden wedding, Nancy ——

Nancy. You did, Sir John. I shouldn't have come without.

John. Do you countenance this — affair?

Nancy. What's wrong with it?

Rose [*timidly*]. Yes, John. What's wrong with it? Why shouldn't my Muriel marry her Richard?

John. What's wrong with it, d'you say? What ——!

Emily [*passionately*]. I won't agree to it.

John [*to Nancy*]. Nothing wrong with it, from your point of view. Nothing! [*Laughing.*] Only I sha'n't have it. I won't have it.

Rose. Grandpa, why do you always try to cross me?

John. I? You?

Rose. I've been yielding to you in everything for fifty years. I think I'm old enough to have my own way now — just once.

John [*startled*]. What's come over you?

Rose. Nothing's come over me. But I really ——

John [*subduing her*]. Be silent, granny!

Nancy. We thought you thought very highly of Richard.

John. So I do. But what's that got to do with it? It's nothing but this genius business over again.

Nancy. Genius business?

John. Yes. I shall be told Richard's a genius,

therefore he must be allowed to marry Muriel. Nonsense! I had just the same difficulty with her mother twenty-six years ago. You ought to remember; you were there! Hadn't I, Emily?

Emily [*faintly*]. Yes.

John [*not hearing*]. What's that?

Emily. Yes, father. Yes.

John. Of course I had. I wouldn't have it then, and I won't have it now. What? Here's a young fellow, a very smart engineer. Insists on going to Canada. Wants capital! Well, I give it him! I tell him he may go. Everything's settled. And then, if you please, he calmly announces his intention of carrying off my grand-daughter — him!

Rose. If she's your grand-daughter, he's my nephew.

John [*glaring at her*]. Sh!

Rose. No! I wo ——

John [*continuing, staring at Rose*]. My grand-daughter has got to marry something very different from an engineer.

Nancy. If she did she might marry something that'll turn her hair grey a good deal sooner.

John. I have my plans for Muriel.

Emily. Imagine Muriel in Winnipeg!

Muriel. What plans, granddad? You've never told me about any plans.

John. Not told you! At your age, your mother had a conspicuous place in London society.

And it's your duty to carry on the family tradition. Your mother didn't marry into the peerage so that you could gallivant up and down Winnipeg as the wife of a manufacturing engineer. You have some notion of politics, though it's a mighty queer one ——

Muriel. I hardly think my politics would further your plan, granddad. I should have supposed the whole of my career would have made it plain that I have the greatest contempt for official politics.

John. Your "career"! Your "contempt"! [*Laughs good-humouredly, then more softly.*] My child ——

Muriel [*nettled*]. I'm not a child.

John [*angrily*]. Enough! Don't make yourself ridiculous. [*More quietly.*] Your mother and your brother think as I do. Let that suffice.

Richard. Pardon me, sir, but suppose it won't suffice?

John [*furious*]. I — I ——

Muriel [*violently*]. Granddad, do please keep calm.

John [*as above*]. I'm perfectly calm, I believe.

Nancy [*to Gertrude*]. Then he'd believe anything!

Muriel. You don't seem to have understood that we're engaged to be married.

Gert. I must say ——

John. And what must *you* say? You'll side with my wife against me, and the girl's own mother, I suppose?

Gert. I fail to see any objection whatever.

John. Do you, indeed! Well, objection or no objection, I mean it to be stopped — now, at once.

Muriel. But how shall you stop it, granddad?

John. If I hear one more word of this, one more word — there'll be no thirty thousand pounds for Richard. Not from me, at any rate. And I don't imagine that your mother will help him, or Monkhurst either. Where is he?

Monk. Not much.

Muriel. But that won't stop it, granddad!

Rose [*rising, and going to the hall door*]. John, you're a hard, hard old man. The one thing I ask of you, and on our golden wedding day, too, and you won't even listen. You shut me up as though I were a — a — I do think it's a shame. The poor things. [*She goes out in tears.*]

Nancy [*hurrying out after her*]. Rose! Rose! Don't!

John. Here I arrange a nice little family dinner to celebrate the occasion. I invite no outsiders, so that we shall be nice and homely and comfortable. And this is how you treat me. You induce your grandmother to defy me — the first time in her life. You bring your mother to tears, and you ——

Emily. There's nothing to be said in favour of it — nothing. The very thought of it ——

Richard. I'm awfully sorry.

John. No, you aren't, sir. So don't be impudent. [*Webster enters.*]

Webster. Mr. Arthur Preece, Sir John. I've shown him into the study.

John. Very good. [*Webster goes out.*]

Gert. Why can't Mr. Preece come up here?

John. Because he's come to see me on private business, madam. Private, do I say? It's public enough. Everybody knows that I can't keep my own workmen in order without the help of a Labour M.P. The country's going to the dogs! My own father used to say so, and I never believed him. But it's true. [*He goes to the door.*]

Monk. May I come with you, sir? [*With a superior glance at Muriel.*] These family ructions ——

John. Come! [*John goes off, followed by Monkhurst.*]

Gert. [*meaningly*]. Richard, go and see where your mother is, will you? [*Richard follows the others. A slight pause.*]

Emily [*still weakly and tearfully*]. How your poor grandmother is upset!

Muriel. Yes, I'm very sorry.

Emily. That's something.

Muriel. It's such a humiliating sight. No real arguments. No attempt to understand *my* point

of view! Nothing but blustering and bullying and stamping up and down. He wants to make out that I'm still a child with no will of my own. But it's he who's the child.

Gert. Come, come, Muriel.

Muriel. Yes, it is. A spoilt child! When anything happens that doesn't just please him, there's a fine exhibition of temper. Don't we all know it. And this is the great Sir John Rhead! Bah!

Emily [*amazed*]. Muriel!

Muriel. Oh, of course it isn't his fault! Everyone's always given him his own way — especially grandma. It's positively pathetic; grandma trying to turn against him now. Poor old thing! As if she could! Now!

Emily. Muriel, your cold-bloodedness absolutely frightens me.

Muriel. But, mother, I'm not cold-blooded. It's only common-sense.

Gert. [*clumsily caressing Emily*]. Darling!

Emily. Common-sense will be the finish of me; I've no one left in the world now.

Gert. [*hurt*]. Then I suppose I'm too old to count. And yet for nearly fifty years I've lived for nobody but you. Many and many a time I should have been ready to die — yes, glad to — only you were there.

Emily [*affectionately*]. And yet you're against me now.

Gert. I only want you not to have any regrets.

Emily. Any regrets! My life has been all regrets. Look at me.

Gert. Not all your life, dear — your marriage. [*Muriel looks up.*]

Emily [*firmly, and yet frightened with a look at Muriel*]. Hush, auntie!

Gert. Why? Why should I hush? You say your life's been all regrets, if you care about being honest with Muriel, you ought to tell her now that you did not marry the man you were in love with.

Emily [*in an outburst*]. Don't believe it, Muriel. No one could have been a kinder husband than your father was, and I always loved him.

Muriel [*intimidated by these revelations of feelings*]. Mother!

Gert. Then what do you regret? You had an affection for Ned, but if you had loved him as you loved — the other one — what is there to regret? And now you seem to be doing your best to make regrets for Muriel — and — and — oh, Emily, why do you do it?

Muriel [*moved, but controlling herself*]. Yes, mamma! Why? I'm sure I'm open to hear reason on any subject — even marriage.

Emily [*blackly*]. Reason! Reason! There you are again! My child, you're my oldest, and I've loved you beyond everybody. You've never

been attached to me. It isn't your fault, and I don't blame you. Things happen to be like that, that's all. You don't know how hard you are. If you did, you'd be ready to bite your tongue off. Here I am, with you and Gerald. Gerald is not bad at heart, but he's selfish and he's a fool. I could never talk freely to him, as I do to you. One day he'll be asking me to leave Berkeley Square, and I shall go and finish my days in the country. And here you calmly announce you're off to Canada, and you want my *reasons* for objecting! There's only one reason — all the others are nothing — mere excuses — and you couldn't guess that one reason. You have to be told. If you cared for me, you wouldn't force me to the shame of telling you.

Muriel [*whispering*]. Shame?

Emily. Isn't it humiliating for a mother to have to tell her daughter, who never's even thought of it, that she cannot bear to lose her,— cannot bear? — Canada!

Muriel [*throwing herself at her mother's knees.*] Mother, I'll never leave you! [*She sobs, burying her face in her mother's lap.*]

Gert. [*softly*]. All this self-sacrifice is a sad mistake. [*To Muriel.*] None of us can live for ever. When your mother is gone — what will you do then?

Muriel [*climbing up and kissing her mother*]. I'll never leave you!

Emily. My child!

Gert. [*gently*]. It's wrong of you, Emily! All wrong! [*Arthur Preece enters from the hall. His hair and moustache have grown grey. His expression and manner slightly disillusioned and cynical. In figure he is the same.*]

Preece. Good evening.

Muriel [*on seeing him, rises quickly rather like a school-girl.*] Good evening. [*She goes out rapidly. Preece looks after her a little surprised.*]

Emily [*at once the woman of the world*]. Good evening. You've soon finished your business with father.

Preece [*puzzled by the appearance of things*]. Good evening. [*He shakes hands with Emily.*] What is the matter? The old gentleman really wasn't equal to seeing me. I just told him what I had to tell him about the strikers, and then he said I'd perhaps better come up here. I think he wanted to be alone.

Emily. Poor dear!

Preece. Nothing serious, I hope?

Gert. [*briskly, shaking Preece by the hand*]. The usual thing, Mr. Preece, the usual thing! A new generation has got to the marrying age. You know what it is. I know what it is. Now, Emily, don't begin to cry again. People who behave as selfishly as you're doing have no right to weep — except for their sins.

Emily [*protesting*]. Auntie, this can't possibly interest Mr. Preece.

Gert. [*still more briskly*]. Don't talk that kind of conventional nonsense, Emily! You know quite well it *will* interest Mr. Preece extremely. [*Rising.*] Now just tell him all about it and see what he says. [*With a peculiar tone.*] I suppose you'll admit he ought to be a good judge of such matters? [*She moves to the door.*]

Emily. Where are you going?

Gert. [*imitating Emily slightly*]. That can't possibly interest you. [*Wearily.*] I'm out of patience. [*She goes out of the room.*]

Emily [*trying to force a light tone*]. I hope you had some good news about the workmen for my poor old father. What a finish for his golden wedding day!

Preece [*following her lead*]. Yes, I think his little affair's pretty well fixed up — anyhow for the present. He's shown himself pretty reasonable. If he'd continued to be as obstinate as he was at the start, the thing would have run him into a lot of money.

Emily. I wonder he doesn't retire.

Preece. He's going to. There's to be a Limited Company.

Emily. Father — a Limited Company! He told you?

Preece. Yes.

Emily. Then he must have been feeling it's getting too much for him.

Preece. Well, considering his years — seventy-seven, isn't it? Some of us will be beaten long before that age. [*He sighs.*]

Emily. Why that sigh? You aren't getting ready to give up, are you?

Preece. No, I expect I shall go on till I drop.

Emily. I should have thought you had every reason to be satisfied with what you have done.

Preece. Why?

Emily. Unless you regret giving up steel for politics.

Preece. No. I don't regret that. I'd done all I really wanted to do there. I'd forced your father to take up steel on a big scale. I'd made more than all the money I needed. And other processes were coming along, better than mine.

Emily. I wonder how many men there are who've succeeded as you have done, both in politics and out of politics.

Preece. Do you think I've succeeded in politics?

Emily. You haven't held office, but I've always understood it was because you preferred to be independent.

Preece. It was. I could have sold my soul over and over again for a seat at an Under-Secretary's desk. I wouldn't even lead the Labour Party.

Emily. But everyone knows you're the strongest man in the Labour Party.

Preece. Well, if I am — the strongest man in the Labour Party is rather depressed.

Emily. Why?

Preece. Difficult to say. Twenty years ago, I thought the millennium would be just about established in 1912. Instead of that, it's as far off as ever. It's even further off.

Emily. Further off?

Preece. Yes. And yet a lot of us have worked. By God, we have! But there's a different spirit now. The men are bitter. They can't lead themselves and they won't be led. They won't be led. And nobody knows what's going to happen next. Except that trouble's going to happen. I often wonder why I was cursed with the reforming spirit. How much happier I should have been if I'd cared for nothing in this world but my own work — like young Richard Sibley, for instance.

Emily. Isn't he interested in reform?

Preece. Not he! He's an engineer, only an engineer. He minds his own business. I suppose he's here to-night.

Emily. Yes.

Preece [*in an ordinary tone*]. Why won't you let him marry Miss Muriel?

Emily [*startled*]. Then father's told you?

Preece. Not a word. But Richard and I are

great pals. He's told me his plans. Why shouldn't they marry?

Emily [*weakly*]. Muriel won't go to Canada.

Preece. Won't go to Canada? But I understand she had a tremendous notion of Canada.

Emily. She's promised me she won't go.

Preece. But why should she do that?

Emily [*half breaking down*]. Oh, I know I'm selfish. But — but — I should be quite alone, if she went. And then, it's not what we'd anticipated for her. We naturally hoped ——

Preece. Oh! Of course, if you're in the marriage market ——

Emily. No. Really it's not that — at least as far as I'm concerned. I should be so utterly alone. And she's promised me. If she deserted me ——

Preece. Deserted — rather a strong word ——

Emily. Please don't be hard! You don't know how unhappy I am. You admit you're discouraged.

Preece. I said "depressed."

Emily. Well, depressed, then. Can't you feel for others?

Preece [*rather roughly*]. And who made me admit it? Who kept questioning me and worming it out of me? You wouldn't leave it alone. You're like all the other women — and I've had to do with a few.

Emily [*affronted*]. Please ——

Preece. It isn't sufficient for you to make a man

unhappy. You aren't satisfied till he admits you've made him unhappy.

Emily [*protesting*]. Oh!

Preece. How many times have I seen you since this cursed strike brought me among the family again? Half-a-dozen, perhaps. And every single time I've noticed you feeling your way towards it. And to-night you've just got there.

Emily. Arthur, you must forgive me. It's quite true. We can't help it.

Preece. What should I care about lost millenniums and labour troubles ahead, if I'd any genuine personal interest in my own? Not a jot. Not a tinker's curse! Do you remember you let me kiss you — once?

Emily. Forgive me! I know I oughtn't to be forgiven. But life's so difficult. Ever since I've been seeing you again I've realised how miserable I am — it's such a long time since. It seems as it was some other girl and not me — twenty-six years ago — here! And yet it's like yesterday. [*She sobs.*] [*Preece embraces her first roughly and then very tenderly.*]

Preece. My child!

Emily. I'm an old woman.

Preece. You said it was like yesterday — when you were twenty-three — so it is. [*They kiss again.*]

Emily [*with a little laugh*]. This will kill father.

Preece. Not it. Your father has a remarkable constitution. It's much more likely to kill the Labour Party. [*John enters, agitated and weary.*]

John [*brusquely*]. Where's your mother? She's not in the other room. I thought she was in here. I want to see her.

Emily. She's probably gone to her own room — poor dear!

John. Can't you go and find her? [*He sits down, discouraged.*]

Emily [*coming over to him*]. Father, I've been thinking it over, and I'm afraid we shall have to agree to Muriel's marriage.

John. We shall have to agree to it? I sha'n't agree to it.

Emily. As Mr. Preece says ——

John. Mr. Preece?

Emily. You know how friendly he is to Richard — as Mr. Preece says, why shouldn't they marry?

Preece. I merely ventured to put the question, Sir John.

John. Why shouldn't they? Because they shouldn't. Isn't that enough? [*To Emily.*] A quarter of an hour ago you yourself agreed in the most positive way that there was nothing whatever to be said in favour of such a match.

Emily. I was rather overlooking the fact that they're in love with each other — [*glancing at Preece*] — a quarter of an hour ago.

John. Are all you women gone mad to-night? Preece, do you reckon *you* understand women?

Preece. Now and then one gets a glimpse, sir.

John [*realising state of affairs between Preece and Emily*]. H'm!

Emily [*noticing her father watch her, rather self-consciously*]. After all, what difference can it make to us? We sha'n't be here as long as they will.

John. What? What?

Emily [*louder*]. We sha'n't be here as long as they will, I say.

John. That's it! Tell me I'm an old man! Of course, it can't make any difference to us. I was looking at the matter solely from their point of view. How can it affect me — *whom* Muriel marries?

Emily. Well, then! Let them judge for themselves. You agree? [*John stares before him obstinately.*] Father —— [*John shakes his head impatiently.*] Dad!

John [*looking up like a sulky child*]. Oh, have it your own way. I'm not the girl's mother. If you've made up your mind, there's nothing more to be said.

Emily. And Richard's capital?

John. Oh, it's all lying ready. [*Shrugs his shoulders.*] May as well have it, I suppose.

Emily. You're a dear!

John. I'm not a dear, and I hate to be called a dear.

Emily. What a shocking untruth! I shall go and tell them, I think. [*She goes to the door.*]

John [*calling her back*]. Emily!

Emily. Yes.

John. Don't let them come in here. I couldn't bear it.

Emily. Oh, but ——

John. I couldn't stand the strain of another scene. It's late now — I'm an old man, and people have no right to upset me in this way.

Emily. Couldn't they just say good-night?

John. Very well. They must say good-night and go at once. Another day ——

Emily [*very soothingly*]. I'll tell them you're very tired. [*She nods smilingly at her father and leaves the room. A slight pause.*]

Preece. A difficult job, being the head of a family.

John. I've done with it, Preece. I've decided that to-night — that's what a golden wedding comes to in these days. Things aren't what they were. In my time a man was at any rate master in his own house and on his own works. Seemed natural enough! But you've changed all that.

Preece. I've changed it?

John [*continuing confidentially*]. Why, even my own wife's gone against me to-night. My own

wife! [*Troubled.*] Did you ever hear of such a thing?

Preece. I *have* heard of it, Sir John.

John [*grimly*]. You laugh. Wait till you're married.

Preece. I may have to wait a long time.

John. Eh, what? A long time? Don't try to hoodwink me, Preece. I know what you all say when I'm not there. "Old Rhead." "Be breaking up soon, the old man!" But I'm not yet quite doddering. [*Pointedly.*] You'll be married inside six months — and every newspaper in London will be full of it. Yes, answer that. My workmen go out on strike, and you poke your nose in and arrange it for me. Then my family go out on strike, and upon my soul, you poke your damned nose in there, too, and arrange that for me — on your own terms. Tut — tut! Shake hands, man! You and your like are running the world to the devil, and I'm too old to step in and knock you down. But — but — I wish you luck, my lad. You're a good sort. [*They shake hands. Emily, Nancy, Muriel, Richard and Gertrude all enter from the hall.*]

Preece. Well, good-night, Sir John.

Emily [*cheerfully*]. We're just coming to say good-night, grandpapa. I'm sure you must be very tired. We've said good-night to granny.

John [*feebly*]. Where is she? Where is granny?

Nancy [*heartily shaking hands*]. Good-night, John, and thank you for a very pleasant time. [*She goes to Gertrude, who now stands near the door, and kisses her good-night.*]

Richard [*heartily shaking hands*]. Thank you, sir. [*Nancy passes out by the door. Gertrude now shakes hands with Richard, who follows his mother.*]

Emily [*kisses John*]. Good-night, dear. [*John, turning from Emily, moves with a generous gesture to Muriel, who, however, keeps a very stiff demeanour and shakes hands in cold silence. Emily has reached Gertrude. They both watch Muriel.*]

Emily [*with a shade of disappointment turns to Gertrude.*] Good-night, auntie. [*Gertrude and Emily embrace, then Emily passes quickly out of the door.*]

John [*stiffly, looking about*]. Where's Monkhurst?

Gert. Oh, he is gone! He said he had an appointment at the Club.

John. What Club? The Carlton?

Muriel [*shaking hands with Gertrude*]. The Automobile, you may depend. [*She goes off by the door quickly.*]

Gert. Well, this day is over. [*Webster enters from the hall.*]

Webster. Any orders, Sir John?

John. None.

Gert. Can't we have some of the blaze of electricity turned off?

John. As you like. [*Webster extinguishes several clusters with the switches at the door, then goes out. The room is left in a discreet light.*]

John [*almost plaintively*]. Where's Rose? [*Rose enters timidly from the hall.*]

Gert. Here she is.

Rose [*going up to John*]. John, forgive me for having dared to differ from my dear husband.

John [*taking her hand softly*]. Old girl — [*then half humorously shaking his head*] — you'll be the death of me, if you do it again.

Gert. I think I'm going to bed.

John. No, not yet.

Rose. Gertrude, will you do me a favour, on my golden wedding-day?

Gert. What is it?

Rose. Sing for us.

Gert. Oh! My singing days are over long ago.

John [*persuasively*]. Go on — go on. There's nobody but us to hear.

Gert. Really it is —— [*Stops.*] Very well. [*Gertrude goes through the double doors. Rose draws her lace shawl round her.*]

John. Let's sit by the fire if you're cold. [*He moves a chair in place for her gallantly. Rose sits to the left of the fire. John takes a seat to the right of the fire. The song "Juanita" is heard in*

a cracked and ancient voice, very gently and faintly.]

Rose [*softly, by the fire*]. When I think of all this room has seen ——

John [*looking into the fire*]. Ah!

Rose. I'm sure it's very pleasant to remember.

John. Ah! That's because you're pleasant. I've said it before, and I say it again. The women of to-day aren't what women used to be. They're hard. They've none of the old charm. Unsexed — that's what they are — unsexed. [*Muriel enters quickly from the hall in a rich white cloak. She pauses smiling, then hurries delicately across to her grandfather and embraces him; releases him, shyly takes a flower from her bosom, drops it into his hand, turns and gives her grandmother a smile, whispering "Good-night. They're waiting for me," and hurries out again.*]

John [*looking at the flower*]. We live and learn.

Rose [*nodding her head*]. Yes, John. [*The song continues.*]

[*Curtain.*]

ON THINKING IT OVER*

If ever a play told its own story without any need of note or comment, surely "Milestones" is such a play for a contemporary audience. Although it abounds in allusions to the events, customs and ideas of sixty years ago, all of these are so skilfully introduced that no word of explanation seems necessary. The dialogue forms the easiest of easy reading; and the story continuously holds our interest, notwithstanding two breaks of twenty-five and twenty-seven years respectively between the acts.

Yet this very facility is apt to betray us. Everything runs so smoothly that one may fail to detect the motive power. The characterisation is so deft, the effects are produced with such dexterity, one may easily overlook the skill that lies behind the finished workmanship. It is for the student himself to discover these beauties rather than for the commentator to point them out. A hint or two, however, may not come amiss.

After a first reading of the play (which should be an experience of pure enjoyment, undiminished by any too critical attitude) it would be well to organise a group of readers, each taking a separate

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part, and *play* the comedy act by act. By this means the play becomes immeasurably more vital, and one can much more readily appreciate the technical excellence of the stagecraft.

That matter of stagecraft is sometimes a stumbling-block to those unaccustomed to reading modern plays. In the older type of drama, where the interlocutors of a given scene number, as a rule, only two or three, and where the speeches, though longer are fewer, it is comparatively easy to visualize the stage movements from the printed page. In a modern prose drama, however, with perhaps seven or eight characters speaking briefly and frequently, it needs a little practice for a reader to *see* as he reads, the characters live and move on the stage. So it is advisable, in order to get the full value of the comedy, to read it thus, aloud, and in character.

This is only natural, when we recall that the authors wrote for the stage and not for the study. It is essentially an *acting* play, and we may add, a very successful one. Produced in London and in New York in October, 1912, it won immediate popularity both with the public and with the dramatic critics.

But "Milestones" is much more than a merely competent and effective stage-play. There are bushels of such productions each year. What has made "Milestones" survive the popular commercial success of the box office? In the first place it has a genuine literary quality, and secondly, it is a valuable study in social history.

Perhaps it is easiest to consider the less important aspect first; and regarded merely as an historical document, the play is full of interest. An instructive exercise would be to make a series of lists for each act of the allusions to (a) current events (b) ideas, (c) inventions, (d) fashions, (e) literary history. This analysis would show an extraordinary variety; while even a superficial examination of the text reveals how deftly they are woven into the dialogue, and serve both to help the action and to illustrate the character. We learn not only that in 1860 it was a daring unconventional thing for a young lady to ride alone in a hansom cab, but also how certain people viewed the proceeding.

A similar camparative analysis of the diction of the three acts would be illuminating. The phraseology is remarkably appropriate, both to the person speaking and to the particular period. In the latter connection it is recorded that when the play was first produced, the authors were accused of certain anachronisms of speech, e.g. the use of the expression "O.K." in the year 1885. They replied that the currency of every piece of slang or familiar turn of speech had been authenticated for its period in the back numbers of "Punch"! The search for anachronisms, therefore, is not likely to be successful, though none the less amusing.

But all this study of detail is mere trifling unless it serves to give apprehension of the essential value of the play, and that value lies, as it must

always lie in dramatic literature, in the psychological portraiture. Here we have a gallery of men and women whom we can all recognise as true likenesses. They are true to fundamental human nature the world over, true to the poise and outlook of the English-speaking race, and particularly true to the local and temporary peculiarities of the English of England of the nineteenth century. John Rhead and Samuel Sibley are as English as roast beef and plum pudding; but their types are recognisable everywhere. Perhaps there are more Samuel Sibleys in England and more John Rheads in Canada. We all know Ned Pym, whether or not he inherits a title; of his son Monkhurst Canada is mercifully spared anything worse than a feeble imitation. We have our Richard Sibleys by the score, but have we yet produced an Arthur Preece?

The women of the play, though no less vital and individualised than the men, seem to be less coloured by their environment, and more fundamentally women of anywhere and always. There are qualifications though. Does the younger generation of to-day find Rose Sibley entirely credible? Nancy Sibley we all know, whether she comes from Yorkshire or from Ontario; Muriel may be met on any college campus.

Undoubtedly it is here, in the faithtful delineation of character that Arnold Bennett excels. He knows the middle classes of England, especially of industrial Engand, in all their moods and tenses, and he draws them with an unsurpassed

fidelity. If this is not obvious from "Milestones", we have "The Old Wives' Tales" to prove it. He contrasts their inborn conservatism with their passion for social betterment, their stupid obstinacy with their talent for accepting the inevitable. He makes their snobbishness quite consistent with their native independence, and their silly prejudices with their splendid loyalty.

Of course, all this has been done before in innumerable plays and novels, though rarely with such arresting skill. What adds a special interest, however, in this particular case, is the fact that the characters are shown in the crucible, so to speak, of social change. The mechanical revolution (of which the use of iron for ship-building was only an incident, though an important one) set in motion in England profound changes in political and commercial and family life, that have not yet found equilibrium. These impersonal, intangible forces are seen to enter into the lives of the people in the play, to modify their circumstances, and, by reaction, their outlook on life. We see history translating itself into terms of human character and conduct. Literature affords few examples of such authentic social history.

As a subject for an amateur dramatic club, "Milestones" is most appropriate—the same scene throughout (and an indoor one at that) with but minor changes of "properties", a fairly even distribution of male and female parts, a bright, witty dialogue, an interesting story, an unhackneyed theme, dramatic but not too emotional situations,

and costumes quite easy to extemporise. What more could the amateur producer expect?

It was in 1902 that Arnold Bennett, at the age of 35, began his career as a novelist with "Anna of the Five Towns". His output since then has been extraordinarily varied and copious. Without attempting any assessment of relative value, one may safely commend "The Old Wives' Tales" to every intelligent reader. That book alone, to say nothing of the "Clayhanger" series, would suffice to place him in the front rank of English novelists.

Edward Knoblock is the author of numerous plays, including that notable success "Kismet". He was born in New York, and is a naturalised British subject.

Social Ideas
literary ideas
invention
celebrities

Humorous
God

1860
1885 L/V
1912

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